

**Monday, April 24, 2006**  
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Mocking the mock draft

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By Gregg Easterbrook

Man, look at those legs! Perfect conditioning, ideal proportions. NFL draft fans can't wait to see more. I'm not talking about Reggie Bush's legs. I'm talking about the Rockettes! Tune in Saturday because, for the first time ever, the NFL draft will be held at Radio City Music Hall. And you know ESPN producers will use every possible flimsy excuse to show the gorgeous legs of the Rockettes as they accompany the top draft picks up to the podium to shake ...

*WHAT??? Say what???*

Sadly, although the draft is being held at Radio City Music Hall, the Rockettes will *not* be there. Tuesday Morning Quarterback is still reeling from this dreadful news. The NFL and ESPN have one of the greatest excuses in television history to show hours and hours of beautiful, scantily clad women -- and it's not going to happen. No Rockettes dancing with the draft picks. No lines of kicking legs while the commissioner fumbles through trade cards. No close-up interviews with the Rockettes as the draft drags on into the sixth round when the bell rings and a linebacker from Ohio University of Florida at Ohio is chosen. *The draft is at Radio City but we won't see the Rockettes.* TMQ will spend Saturday in mourning. In addition to being glam and gorgeous, the Rockettes are incredibly fit and athletic! That's a perfectly legitimate reason to have them at the draft! But no. Yours truly will be at Radio City on Saturday, and instead of flirting with the Rockettes, I'll be killing time with Mel Kiper. Jimmy Carter was right: Life is unfair.

Three quick points. First, it's not your imagination that all Rockettes are the same stature. **Error! Hyperlink reference not valid.** (click "Rockettes" then "auditions") specify that Rockettes must be between 5-foot-6 and 5-foot-10½ -- though they do not, perhaps because of New York state gender-discrimination laws, specify that Rockettes must be women. Second, the lack of Rockettes at the draft reminds me of one of the fundamental failings of the National Football League: Though New York City contains thousands of beautiful, theatrically trained young women who really can dance and are looking for their big break, neither the Giants nor the Jets have cheerleaders. Third, ESPN thinks you'd rather look at Mel Kiper's hair than the Rockettes' legs? This might be a harbinger of the end of western civilization.



How could the NFL screw up such a great marketing opportunity?

In other football news, around this time of year sports commentators make knowing references to the [Dallas Chart](#), the table of equivalences used by many teams in calculating how to swap draft choices. The creation of this table is generally credited to Jimmy Johnson. (When he was coach of the Cowboys, Johnson made so many draft-pick swaps it was as if he was on commission and "churning" to increase his annual bonus.) The Dallas Chart is definitely handy. It ordains, for instance, that if the Jets, picking fourth, want to swap up with the Saints, picking second, Jersey/B would need to throw in 800 points worth of value -- and the Jets' second and third choices this year

are worth 790 points, according to the chart. The chart works equally well on non-glamour picks. For instance, the chart dictates that a team wanting to acquire the final pick of the fourth round would offer a pick in the middle of the fifth round plus a pick at the top of the seventh. Now that most NFL teams have this chart, swaps are surely simplified: As neoclassical economics maintains, markets are most efficient when participants have the maximum information about prices! In the econ mode, next week TMQ will propose how to use the chart to "discount to present value" draft selections in future years.

Now look at the Dallas Chart more closely. According to its logic, a team would need to trade 1,500 picks at the end of the seventh round to get the first overall choice in the draft. I submit that any NFL club would be *much* better off with 1,500 late-seventh-round selections than the first overall choice. OK, with 1,500 seventh-round choices, your voluntary mandatory minicamp would be a little crowded. But give me 1,500 seventh-round selections and I guarantee I will find you some quality NFL starters -- whereas give me the first overall choice and I can make no such guarantee. Or take the 16th overall choice, midway through the first round. The chart says a team should be able to swap the 16th overall selection, worth 1,000 points, for 122 mid-seventh-round picks, which the chart says are worth 8.2 points each. (Love that pseudo-scientific decimal place.) An NFL team would be *much* better off with 122 mid-seventh-round selections than with one mid-first-round pick. Want another example? The chart says the 10th overall selection, held by Arizona and valued at 1,300 points, is worth the same as the entire fifth round, whose picks have an average value of about 35 points. I double-dog dare you to claim a team wouldn't be better off with every choice of the entire fifth round than with the 10th overall selection.

In more football news, the Brett Favre melodrama has become ridiculous. What's next, an all-Brett 24-hour cable channel? ("Today, Brett talks to us about what he might talk to us about tomorrow.") Favre addresses the United Nations General Assembly? ("I thank those nations whose names even their own citizens can't pronounce for inviting me here today to dodge questions, fudge the obvious and say nothing -- just like when world leaders talk to the United Nations!") But annoying though the melodrama is, you can't fault Favre for playing the system. Don't fall for that country-boy act; the Green Bay quarterback has long been at the forefront of understanding how to exploit modern media. Endless inconclusive evasions about whether he will retire keep his name in the news, increasing Favre's value to advertisers as an endorser. All the build-up, in turn, assures that whatever he ultimately does announce about playing or quitting will receive 10 times the attention it would otherwise merit. Don't be surprised if Katie Couric leads the CBS Evening News with Favre's decision, assuming he makes up his mind within the historical period of *Homo sapiens*.

In other football news, Reggie Bush will go very high in the draft. Truth or falsity of the house flap aside, Bush sure did look good in college, he seems to be a fine young man and he's leading a charge against the Illustrated Man fad in sports, so that's all to the good. (In the classic Ray Bradbury story, the "Illustrated Man" was not only covered with tattoos, but the tattoos moved; anyway, Bush doesn't have any tattoos.) But Bush weighs 200 pounds, and in recent annals few have been successful every-down NFL tailbacks at that weight -- Warrick Dunn, Thurman Thomas. In his final collegiate game, when USC needed two yards to win the national championship, not only did Bush not get the ball, he wasn't even on the field. Pete Carroll waved Bush to the sidelines when the championship was on the line. Something to think about if Reggie goes first.

In still other football news, everyone's got a mock draft. Right now the Priory of Sion is huddled in a secret underground abbey, trying to predict whether the Rams will trade up. Although everyone has a mock draft, who actually *mocks* the draft? Tuesday Morning Quarterback, of course. Below, my annual mocking of mock drafts. And while everyone predicts the first choice in the NFL draft,

only Tuesday Morning Quarterback annually predicts the last choice! For years, Tuesday Morning Quarterback has skipped the prestigious top of the draft and gone directly to forecasting the lowly seventh round. My annual seventh-round forecast follows, too.

Finally, on a personal note, I'd like to share something I've been waiting three years to say: Yikes, this Page 2 yellow is bright! Maybe I should write the column in the dark. Anyway, I enjoyed my time at NFL.com, where I learned so much football that I now practically know what I'm talking about. But somehow the football gods always meant for Tuesday Morning Quarterback to be a part of ESPN. So when my NFL contract expired recently, I journeyed alone to a distant mountaintop -- OK, to a distant parking lot -- and asked the football gods for guidance. They told me to wish upon a star! Here is the rest in song:

*Like a bolt out of the blue  
fate steps in and sees you through.  
When you wish upon a star  
your dreams come true.*

TMQ's Mock Draft

### **1. Houston Texans: Dick Cheney, novice marksman, Ducks Unlimited**

The Texans will switch to the shotgun formation. Instead of "Hike," Houston quarterbacks will yell "Pull!" Ducks Unlimited says its members "celebrate the traditions and the heritage of sport hunting as an integral part of [sound wildlife management](#)." So Cheney wasn't trying to kill ducks, he was engaged in sound wildlife management.

### **2. New Orleans Saints: Hans Brinker, Dutch 8-year-old**

Alone and frightened, Brinker spent the night with his hand on a levee breach to [save the town of Haarlem](#). If this had happened in 2005 rather than in the 19th century, Brinker would have called a press conference to deny that anything was wrong with the dikes.

### **3. Tennessee Titans: Lizette Atkinson through Scott Winsett, video game designers, [Ensemble Studios](#)**

Ensemble's "Age of Mythology: The Titans" "transports players to a time when heroes did battle with monsters of legend and the gods intervened." Many monsters are on the Titans' schedule this fall, and divine intervention might be the team's best hope.

### **4. New Jersey Jets: Blackstar, [secret jet program](#)**

According to the aerospace industry publication Aviation Week and Space Technology, which yours truly calls Aviation Leak and Space Terminology, the Pentagon quietly removed from mothballs the parts of the old XB-70 supersonic bomber, canceled in 1966, and assembled them into Blackstar, a carrier aircraft capable of launching a small manned spaceplane. Whether Blackstar has launched covertly an Air Force astronaut into orbit is unknown, but the magazine offered credible sightings, including from an F-15 pilot, of Blackstar and its baby spacecraft in flight. Since the public Jets aren't doing too well, maybe a clandestine jet is what the Jersey/B franchise needs. (Note: The Blackstar is white. This is, after all, the Pentagon we are talking about.)



### 5. Green Bay Packers: Hamlet, Prince of Denmark

Hamlet couldn't make up his mind -- just like Brett Favre. At least Hamlet did not call press conferences to announce he had nothing to announce or give non-stop "exclusive" interviews about his indecision on whether to attack Claudius. "Exclusive" once meant, "Yours is the only news organization I am speaking to." In Favre's case "exclusive" means, "Yours is the only news organization I am speaking to at this particular instant."

### 6. San Francisco 49ers: Scarlett Johansson, nude mega-babe

San Francisco prides itself on being America's most worldly and sophisticated city, so it is the natural choice for the first NFL team with a naked woman on the sideline -- and the Niners will need something to distract fans' attention from the field. Mega-babe note No. 1: According to [this English art critic](#), Johansson was nude, not naked, in her recent magazine cover. It's a critical distinction! Mega-babe note No. 2: Extrapolating out current trends in cheerleader attire, naked women on the sidelines will be standard in the NFL by the year 2011. Just when the next network contracts get negotiated!

### 7. Oakland Raiders: Lucifer, frozen devil, University of Gehenna

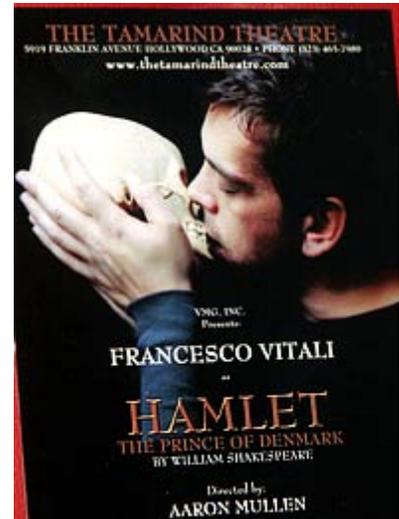
To prevent a strike that might have torn pro football apart, Raiders boss Al Davis cooperated with the league, putting his own concerns aside to help save the NFL. At that moment Lucifer looked around and said, "Hey, did somebody touch the thermostat? It's getting cold in here."

### 8. Buffalo Bills: Billy Shaw, guard, Pro Football Hall of Fame

It's been six years since Buffalo made the playoffs, and six years since the Bills fielded a respectable offensive line. Could there possibly be a relationship between these data points? In the second round, the Bills, now run by octogenarian Marv Levy, hope to tab 87-year-old Mike Wallace as spokesman.

### 9. Detroit Lions: Santonio Holmes, wide receiver, Ohio State

Canny Lions general manager Matt Millen plans to use his first-round choice on a wide receiver every year until 2024, when Detroit will field the only squad ever on which all 22 starters are wide receivers drafted in the first round.



Brett, take note: "To be, or not to be." Look what happened to Hamlet when he couldn't make up his mind.

**10. Arizona Cardinals: Mohammed Sharaf, CEO, [Dubai Ports World](#)**

The United States wanted to hand over port management to Dubai, a more civilized place than the pundits would have you believe. Maybe the woeful Cards should hand over management of their team to the United Arab Emirates -- especially since Mohammed Sharaf got his business degree at the University of Arizona.

**11. St. Louis Rams: Aaron Garcia, quarterback, New York Dragons**

The Rams began a Super Bowl run the last time they tabbed an Arena League star. Garcia is pro football's all-time leading passer by a huge margin, having thrown 757 career touchdown passes, nearly double the NFL record of 420 by Dan Marino. Garcia has 132 touchdown passes since the start of 2005 alone, despite missing some time with an injury.

**12. Cleveland Browns: Leo Hirshfield, candymaker**

Thank you, Leo, for devising the Tootsie Roll in Brooklyn in 1896. Hirshfield's big innovation was marketing Tootsie Rolls as the [first individually wrapped penny candy](#); to that point, penny candy came loose in barrels, and sanitary standards fell short of ideal. In America, it's often more about the packaging than the product! Browns fans should bear this in mind during what might be another long season.

**13. Baltimore Ravens: Pallas, Greek goddess**

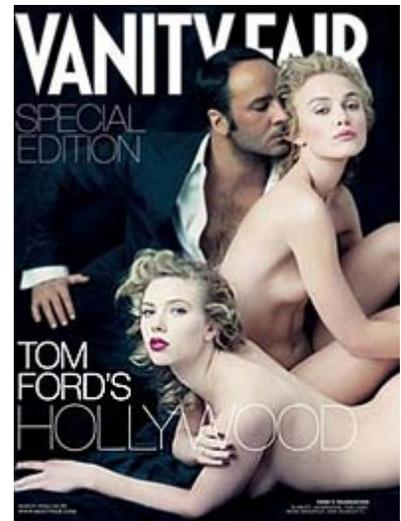
In Poe's "[The Raven](#)", the metaphorical raven alights on a "pallid bust of Pallas." Everyone knows the first stanza of this 1,000-word poem -- "Once upon a midnight dreary" -- but how many know the rest? "Leave my loneliness unbroken! Quit the bust above my door!" Poe bellows at the bird. Ravens fans should study "The Raven" for chants. When the defense makes a play they could chant, "The rustling of each purple curtain thrilled me!" When scantily clad Baltimore cheerleaders dance, spectators could chant, "Clasp a rare and radiant maiden!"

**14. Philadelphia Eagles: Roger Ramjet, Hero of Our Nation**

After Terrell Owens, the goody-goody Ramjet might be just what the Eagles need to restore their karma. [Here](#), listen to the super-cheesy Ramjet theme and watch a grainy image of a 1960s cartoon. Ramjet was voiced by Gary Owens, also the announcer for the old "Rowan and Martin's Laugh In."

**15. Denver Broncos: Maurice Clarett, part-time bag boy, Piggly Wiggly**

Clarett hasn't carried the ball for three seasons. According to the Broncos' logic in last year's draft, that should make him even more valuable. [Here](#), Piggly Wiggly offers advice on how to crush crackers.



Nakedness ... err, we mean  
nudity ... is an artform.

### **16. Miami Dolphins: Any beach goddess, South Beach**

Miami has, you know, like *so* totally replaced Southern California as the beach capital of the world. Why isn't Arnold Schwarzenegger up in arms about that? And why doesn't some entrepreneur start a cable channel that does nothing but televise babes walking along Florida beaches? Then again, some could not be shown for thong-based reasons.



There needs to be a 24-hour cable access channel dedicated to South Beach.

### **17. Minnesota Vikings: Anna Nicole Smith, respectable stripper**

The Love Boat might have been a PR fiasco for the Vikings, but there's no getting around that Minnesota was 1-3 before the team spent an evening with some lap dancers and 8-4 after. [At Smith's Web site](#), she describes herself as an "international model." After providing a 97-word bio, Smith declares, "I don't feel like writing any more."

### **18. Dallas Cowboys: Dr. Phil, licensed clinical psychologist**

Phil McGraw is "a licensed clinical psychologist in the great state of Texas," according to his [official bio](#), yet films his show in Hollywood. This means he does not practice psychology on his shows, because he is not licensed to practice in California. But there are no laws saying you can't hand out worthless advice on the air to people you've met only moments before. Dr. Phil has "published numerous scholarly articles," his Web site claims, though strangely lists none. Check McGraw's preposterously negative [guidance to the married](#), which includes these cheery assignments: "Write one page about the current deadness in your life. Write a 65-item 'bitch list' about your partner." *Darling, I have 65 written complaints about you I'd like to discuss.* Imagine if the Cowboys took Dr. Phil's advice:

BILL PARCELLS: When the going gets tough, the tough ...

TERRELL OWENS: I feel a current deadness in my life.

PARCELLS: Go out there and ...

OWENS: We need to discuss my bitch list. It contains 65 items.

PARCELLS: I want you men to smash the living ...

OWENS: Item No. 1: People should stand when I enter the room. Item No. 2: The white star at the center of Texas Stadium should be replaced with my picture. Item No. 3: I was not invited to be the keynote speaker at the funeral of Coretta Scott King. Item No. 4: My helipad at the practice facility still isn't ready. Item No. 5 ...

PARCELLS: Get me Dr. Phil!

TEAM OFFICIAL: Sorry, he's writing a scholarly article.

### **19. San Diego Chargers: Diogenes of Sinope, Greek philosopher**

San Diego keeps changing mayors owing to corruption convictions; corruption charges have been filed against former managers of the city's pension board; Randy Cunningham, the congressman who just pleaded guilty to taking bribes, hails from San Diego.

**20. Kansas City Chiefs: Katie Couric, anchor, CBS Evening News**

Herm Edwards decided he no longer felt like honoring the Jets contract he signed his name to. Hey Chiefs, just remember, when you hire someone who's only in it for himself, you get someone who's only in it for himself. At least Katie had the dignity to wait until her contract expired.

**21. New England Patriots: Sam Walton, founder, Wal-Mart**  
Really, who needs players? Cut costs to the bone. Replace all veterans with rookie free agents who are forced to work unpaid overtime. Cancel medical benefits. Use less-expensive assembled-in-China players. Sign of the times: New England is the first NFL team with a [Chinese-language official Web site](#).

**22. San Francisco 49ers: Gavin Newsom, [hip hunk mayor](#)**  
Every Democratic political strategist goes to bed dreaming about Newsom, who's charming, handsome, intelligent, young, conscientious, third-way and wins elections in America's most important state. Why does this make me think he will lose the 2016 presidential ballot to Jenna Bush? San Francisco just announced it will become the first major U.S. city to beam free wireless Internet to anyone within its boundaries. I'm puzzled that the winners of the bidding to provide this service, Google and Earthlink, are described by the San Francisco Chronicle as [delighted to beat out others](#) for "the highly coveted contract." If the point is free service for the dispossessed, why are big corporations fighting for the foot in the door?

**23. Tampa Bay Buccaneers: Jack Abramoff, picaroon, Greenberg Traurig LLP**

Buccaneers are pirates, and who has stolen more while showing less conscience than Republican insider lobbyist Abramoff? The Bucs could lock Abramoff up with a long-term contract for the length of his six-year prison sentence. Though Greenberg Traurig, Abramoff's law firm, maintains it had absolutely no way of knowing its former high official was a criminal who methodically stole at least \$20 million from clients, the firm still [weirdly boasts](#) its lobbying division has "access to decision-makers at every level of government."

**24. Cincinnati Bengals: Nick Mangold, center, Ohio State**  
Possible actual choice thrown in for variety. On the second day, the Bengals hope to draft running back Wali Lundy of Virginia, to join the current Cincinnati running backs with the first names Rudi and Jeremi.

**25. Chicago Bears: Projected trade**

The Bears send their first and third picks in 2006, fourth pick in 2007, seventh pick in 2008, second pick in 2009, third and sixth selections in 2010, fifth pick in 2011, a choice to be determined later in 2012 and a projected compensatory pick in 2013 to the Giants for New Jersey's first and fourth picks in 2006, fifth pick in 2007, sixth pick in 2008, second selection in 2009, third and fifth picks in 2010, sixth pick in 2011, fifth choice in 2012 and a fruit basket. Also, the teams agree to link to



Katie knows a thing or two about contracts.



Abramoff should join a new league of pirates.

each other on MySpace. If the trade doesn't happen, Chicago will select Courtney Love, rock star. A Lovie-Love match! In the second round, Chicago hopes to tab rocker Patti Smith to tart up the [aging team song](#), "Bear Down Chicago Bears."

**26. New Jersey Giants: Cooper Manning, energy analyst, [Howard Weil](#)**

Cooper is the older brother of Peyton and Eli. Hometown draftniks at Radio City Music Hall will howl in outrage over this pick -- because hometown draftniks always howl in outrage no matter whom the Giants choose.

**27. Carolina Panthers: John Edwards, undersized former senator**

When Edwards ran for the Democratic presidential nomination in 2004, the knock was he lacked sufficient government experience for the White House. What's he done since 2004? Run for the 2008 nomination.

**28. Jacksonville Jaguars: *Puma concolor coryi*, recovering species**

Close to extinction just a few decades ago, the Florida panther has rebounded enough that people-panther confrontations are [becoming a worry](#) in the Sunshine State. Why is the Jax franchise named after the cat found in South America, not the one found in Florida?

**29. New Jersey Jets: Bribe-seeking gossip writers from the New York Post**

The New York press corps is tough on the Jets -- maybe the team should simply put them on retainer? Note: Billionaire Ron Burkle surely did the right thing in ethical terms by blowing the whistle on the shakedown attempt against him. But in practical terms? In practical terms, a billionaire might consider \$120,000 a year for favorable press a good deal.

**30. Indianapolis Colts: Henry Heimlich, [Ohio physician](#)**

Someone must be able to stop the Colts from choking in the playoffs.

**31. Seattle Seahawks: Dale Earnhardt Jr., NASCAR driver**

The NFL has studied the instant replay system used in the Nextel Cup, looking for ways to improve officiating. Had the NASCAR system been employed at the Super Bowl, Seattle still would have lost, as Sean Locklear would have been called for removing his restrictor plate and Matt Hasselbeck would have been black-flagged for speeding in the pit.

**32. Pittsburgh Steelers: Roh Moo-hyun, president, Republic of Korea**

Wide receiver Hines Ward, who is short by NFL standards at 6 feet tall, towered over Roh at their [recent lunch in Seoul](#). Anyone who can make the Super Bowl MVP stand even taller is worth having on the roster.



The NFL ranks right behind video gaming as popular sports in Korea.

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**Here's Our Bill for \$10 Million, and We Are Recommending Tom DeLay as the New NFL Commissioner. What -- There's a Problem With Him?**

The NFL has hired Korn/Ferry International, a recruiting firm, to seek commissioner candidates. "The firm will begin the process by interviewing all 32 owners," [The Associated Press reported](#). To find out what, that the NFL wants a competent commissioner? Yours truly is suspicious of the whole executive-recruitment process. For instance, the University of Wyoming recently paid Korn/Kerry \$90,000 to recommend someone for its

presidency. Both finalists recommended by Korn/Ferry turned down the job, which ended up going to the single most obvious candidate, the [guy already in the chair](#) as the school's interim president. Often in big organizations, hiring a headhunter firm just creates a cover story for doing what the big organization already had decided to do anyway. Back to Korn/Ferry. As yours truly pointed out [last year](#) on the pages of NFL.com itself, the company is engaged in a nasty lawsuit with a former top manager, whom Korn/Ferry accuses of stealing proprietary files when he left to form his own recruiting agency. Needless to say, I have no idea whether the accusation is true. But suppose it is true: This means the executive recruitment agency hired someone unqualified and placed him in a position of responsibility! Maybe Korn/Ferry needs a recruiting firm to find executives to run Korn/Ferry.

### **Greenspan's Book to Be Titled "Interest Rates May Fall, Unless They Rise"**

Former Fed chief Alan Greenspan received an \$8.5 million book advance from Penguin. Even assuming an as-told-to actually written by a ghost, a \$8.5 million advance for a man whose every utterance is incomprehensible? This matches the second-largest advance in publishing history, given to Pope John Paul II for "Crossing the Threshold of Hope"; the biggest advance, \$10 million, went to Bill Clinton for his forest-destroyer, "My Life." Clinton's volume could have been called, "Crossing the Threshold of the Thousandth Page" a feat yours truly suspects not one reader ever accomplished. In order for Greenspan's book to "earn back" an \$8.5 million advance, it will need to sell about two million hardcover copies, which is Stephen King numbers. The cheeky [Deal Book business blog](#) of the New York Times obtained Greenspan's publishing proposal, which contains such insights as, "The book will ultimately conclude that the longer-term outlook for the global economy and, for that matter the U.S. economy as well, will be significantly affected by the future of China." Wow -- talk about sophisticated revelations! Twenty-five years privy to the innermost councils of power and the best Greenspan can come up with is that China affects the economy?

Deal Book has existed only a short time and already those who follow business are hooked. But if you really want to feel like a consummate insider, subscribe to a free e-mail called [PE Week Wire](#). Written by Daniel Primack, PE Week Wire is the Tuesday Morning Quarterback of the financial world -- brimming with gossip and information on venture capitalism and private-equity firms. Private-equity firms are increasingly important to global finance, and quick, do you know what they are? Can you name even one?

### **Orwell Would Wince**

Surely there are thousands of illegal immigrants who would cover kicks in the NFL for less than the \$275,000 minimum salary for the 2006 season. So why not allow illegal immigrants in the NFL? They could be called *gastoffsiders* and paid \$5.15 an hour, the scandalously low federal minimum wage. No health care insurance would be provided, plus they would be expected to bring their own ankle tape. Or they could work as football day laborers, gathering each morning in the predawn hours at some 7-11, hoping an NFL general manager comes by and offers them a day's work on the scout team.

OK, enough of that joke. Whatever you think of the immigration debate -- yours truly is pro-immigration but points out that America does now annually accept more immigrants than *all other nations of the world combined* -- it's ridiculous that politicians and journalists insist on calling the people in question "undocumented arrivals," as if the problem was their paperwork had been misplaced. The problem with illegal immigrants is that they are illegal: They've broken American law. What to do about those who broke the law when they entered the country, but since have been law-abiding good citizens who love America, is the crux of the debate. Focus must be kept on the

word *illegal* if the core dilemma is to be addressed. Using a silly euphemism like "undocumented" only makes it hard to think clearly about this issue.

Similarly, it's ridiculous that politicians and journalists continue to call those being held at Guantanamo and Bagram airbase in Afghanistan "detainees." You are detained when your train is late; if you're dragged away in handcuffs, locked up and not allowed to speak to a lawyer, you are a prisoner. Those being held at Guantanamo and Bagram are not told, "Excuse me, sir, we will be detaining you. Would you like a fresh brioche?" They're told, "You are our prisoner, do as we tell you if you want to live." We can't think clearly about the hundreds of men being held without charge by the United States government unless we call them what they are, prisoners. George Orwell's point regarding language was that society cannot face political issues unless it calls things what they are; the purpose of political euphemism, Orwell wrote, is to prevent clear thought. People living here without visas are illegal immigrants and people jailed without charge are prisoners. Politicians might be addicted to fudging words but the media, at least, should call things what they are.

### **Take Me Out of This Ballpark**

Recently the D.C. Sports and Entertainment Commission unveiled the design of the [Washington Nationals' new baseball park](#), and the announcement made yours truly glad he does not reside in the District of Columbia. Local taxpayers will be on the hook for \$535 million in bonds to support this potential white elephant. Not only is there a strong chance the stadium will flop in the marketplace - - more on that in a moment -- the price tag seems likely to include substantial graft. Consider that Citizens Bank Park in nearby Philadelphia, the Phillies' new home, opened in 2004 and was built for \$346 million, only \$174 million of it foisted upon local taxpayers. Citizens Bank Park is larger than the planned Washington Nationals park, sits on similar downtown land bought at similar downtown prices, yet cost taxpayers only about a third as much. Recently opened Gillette Field, financed mainly at Patriots owner Robert Kraft's expense, [came in at \\$325 million](#) and is substantially larger than the planned Nats ballpark. The just-announced new Yankee Stadium is projected to cost \$800 million, but will be larger than the Washington ballpark and will sit on 22 acres of the most expensive land in North America. Yet taxpayers are contributing about \$300 million to the Yankee Stadium project, less than the bill to be handed to taxpayers for the smaller Washington facility.

It's easy to be careless with other people's money, especially with the money of taxpayers, who cannot demand refunds or sue for breach of contract. Gillette Field was built using private funds under market discipline; the Washington stadium will be built at taxpayer expense with no fiscal discipline. Surely that's a reason the price is so high. But another reason may be that some portion of the price is likely to be stolen by cronies of the District's top-heavy, inept government. Indeed, the D.C. Council seemed determined to push the stadium cost well above the price of comparable facilities, in order to assure there was plenty in the pot to steal. George W. Bush, the most baseball-obsessed president since William Howard Taft, has allowed this tax-subsidized pocket-picking directly under his nose, while making no attempt to pressure his pals in the corporate suites of Major League Baseball into building the stadium the free-market way. Maybe the naming rights should be sold to Halliburton.



All yours, D.C. baseball fans, for \$535 million -- and don't forget the cost overruns!

... Welcome to Halliburton Field, where hot dogs are \$6,000 and all overhead costs are billed to the defense budget.

Why might the Washington ballpark lack customers? First, it's situated at one of the worst traffic choke points in the nation's capital -- and that's now, before stadium traffic. Many stadia are hard to get in and out of. Experience shows that customers will bear traffic gridlock for football games, which happen only a few times a year, but won't frequent the much-more-regular MLB games unless access is convenient, and the Nats' field is being plunked down at one of the hardest-to-reach spots on the East Coast. Second, the high \$535 million price will include a ridiculously low 1,225 parking places, some of which will be reserved for D.C. government officials. That's one parking space for every 34 seats. The new Yankee Stadium will have decked garages with 10,000 parking spaces, one space for every 5.3 seats. The Arizona Cardinals' new stadium, rising in Glendale, Ariz., will have 14,000 dedicated parking spaces for 63,000 seats, one space per 4.5 seats. No matter how good the Nats might be, suburbanites, who are the core demographic for all professional sports, might come to the new ballpark once, discover traffic is backed up and there's nowhere to park, and never return. When the ballpark project zeroes out the D.C. government's bond rating, please, congressional committees, don't say you weren't warned.

Bonus: The Nats' new facility will "strive to be the most environmentally friendly MLB ballpark ever," the D.C. sports authority declared, though no details were given. How very Washington -- dramatic announcement, no specifics. It is in fact possible to build environmentally responsible sports facilities: Gillette Field, for instance, has its own wastewater processing plant. Tuesday Morning Quarterback suspects the primary environmentally friendly feature of the new Nats ballpark will be that no spectators come, thus conserving gasoline.

### **In Praise of Tight Ends**

Because Maryland tight end Vernon Davis might be among the first 10 players chosen Saturday, some purists insist tight ends should not go high in the draft. Quarterbacks, left tackles, cornerbacks and defensive ends should be the highest choices, according to draftnik purism, while tight ends, guards and safeties should not go high. If I were a coach, I'd rather use a high pick on a successful tight end than a bad tackle. Consider 2002, when Detroit spent the third overall selection on quarterback Joey Harrington and Buffalo spent the fourth overall on tackle Mike Williams. These gentlemen played positions that draftniks view as top-pick-worthy, and both went bust. Among the players Detroit and Buffalo passed on were safety Roy Williams and tight end Jeremy Shockey. They weren't supposed to go at the top of the draft because safety and tight end are not viewed as premium positions, yet obviously the Lions and Bills now wish they'd taken one or the other.

Purists have been asserting that Tony Gonzalez, taken 13th in 1997, went as high as a tight end should go. Yet many teams that passed on Gonzalez in the first dozen picks of that draft now wish they hadn't, in no small part because in an age of Cover Two (that is, zone) pass defenses, the tight end is more attractive as a target. Mike Ditka and John Mackey, Hall of Fame tight ends who played in the 1960s and 1970s, had career averages that equated to around 600 yards gained receiving per season in today's terms. (Ditka averaged 484 yards receiving per season and Mackey 523, but they played 14 regular-season games versus today's 16.) In the 2005 season, 10 NFL tight ends gained about as much as these Hall of Famers' numbers equate to, and few of the 2005 tight ends are Canton-bound. Today's Cover Two zones, which emphasize taking away the short outside pattern and the fly pattern, make it easier for tight ends to get open than for wide receivers. The well-coached quarterback is looking for the tight end, increasing the value of this position.

Consider another of my "reimagined" first rounds. Below is what the 1997 first round would have been, had what is known now been known then. My draft reimagining criteria favor longevity over

flash, so in this case I spend a No. 1 on Mike Minter, who's been consistently productive if never spectacular, but not on Ross Verba, who was a star for a couple years, then flamed out. The players' actual draft positions from 1997 are in parentheses, and I stop at 30 because there were 30 No. 1 selections that year.

1. Orlando Pace (1)
2. Tiki Barber (36)
3. Walter Jones (6)
4. Tony Gonzalez (13)
5. Priest Holmes (undrafted)
6. Ronde Barber (66)
7. Matt Lepsis (undrafted)
8. Tarik Glenn (19)
9. Shawn Springs (3)
10. Jeff Mitchell (134)
11. James Farrior (8)
12. Warrick Dunn (12)
13. Jason Taylor (73)
14. Darren Sharper (60)
15. Dexter Coakley (65)
16. Jake Plummer (42)
17. Corey Dillon (43)
18. Sam Madison (44)
19. Mike Vrabel (91)
20. Adam Meadows (48)
21. Pat Williams (undrafted)
22. Trevor Pryce (28)
23. Mike Minter (56)
24. Chris Naeole (10)
25. Grady Jackson (193)
26. Duce Staley (71)
27. Ryan Tucker (112)
28. Chad Scott (24)
29. Kris Mangum (228)
30. Brad Maynard (95)

Note that two of the players who should have been lottery-level selections weren't chosen by anyone in the actual 1997 draft. Also note that only [nine from the actual 1997 first round](#) make the reimagined first round. The actual 1997 first round was a parade of blown picks and who-dats -- Michael Booker, Jim Druckenmiller, Yatil Green; it's not pretty.

### **This Week's Galactica Complaint**

Viewers love the new "reimagined" "Battlestar Galactica," the highest-rated sci-fi series on TV. Critics love "Galactica" too, the Chicago Tribune recently calling it "the best show on television." Viewers seem to like that "Galactica" isn't formulaic sci-fi where justice always prevails and incredibly complex devices can be invented in minutes. Critics seem to like that "Galactica" is dark and depressing, depicting optimism as futile and life as barely worth living. That life is barely worth living is certainly the regnant worldview of modern academia -- strange that a sci-fi series about space battles should be this trendy view's main expression in popular culture.

TMQ's core problem with "Battlestar Galactica" is that the people of the show's imaginary space society are incredibly stupid. True, there are lots of stupid people on Earth, so presumably there would be stupid people on the opposite side of the galaxy. And folly is, inarguably, a grand theme of history. But practically everyone in "Galactica" is so astonishingly falling-down dumb, it's hard to care about their fates: And this is setting aside how, if they're so stupid, they were able to construct enormous faster-than-light starcruisers.

In the pilot for "Galactica," a society spanning 12 planets is threatened by a race of living machines called Cylons. The machines are known to sabotage computer systems. Yet all defense systems on all 12 worlds, along with all military spacecraft, have a common password. A human scientist named Baltar unwittingly gives the password to a Cylon; the Cylons transmit a computer virus containing the code; all humanity's military systems stop working; the planets are helpless against the attack that follows. Now, do you suppose there is one single password that controls every device in the American military? We'd be idiots to engineer such a code, exactly because it might fall into the wrong hands. Yet on "Galactica" not only can every defensive system built by humanity be remotely deactivated, the information necessary to do this has been placed in the hands of a mentally unstable scientist. This is one stupid society we've got here. (Two gigantic space battleships did not receive the deactivation transmission and are protecting humanity's survivors, creating the premise of the series.)

The author James Blish has said that much of sci-fi relies on Idiot Plots, defined as stories "kept in motion solely by virtue of the fact that everybody involved is an idiot." (See the entry on Idiot Plots in the 2005 edition of the "Greenwood Encyclopedia of Science Fiction and Fantasy," said entry by Official Brother Neil Easterbrook of Texas Christian University.) Consider a brief rundown of "Galactica" stupidity as exemplified by the character Baltar, named after the traitor of the original 1970s series. Baltar escapes the Cylon invasion and becomes a trusted science advisor to the remaining human leadership. No one in military intelligence seems struck by the fact that all the defensive systems turned themselves off precisely at the moment of the attack, nor wonders whether this might have had something to do with Baltar, who possessed the code. Baltar rises to become vice president in the survivors' government. He obtains high position though he often speaks, aloud, to a Cylon avatar that manifests in his consciousness. That is -- the other characters *hear Baltar talking to a Cylon*, yet are too stupid to think anything of it.

In the final few episodes of the recently concluded season, Idiot Plots drove the action. Baltar is assigned to interrogate a Cylon spy and instead helps her escape, killing a guard in the process. No one suspects Baltar, though he and the guard were the sole people with the Cylon and though, presumably, faster-than-light starcruisers would have video monitors in their detention cells. Baltar claims he can build a Cylon detector, but needs plutonium for the device. Rather than supply Baltar with a vial of plutonium the fleet's leader, Admiral Adama, gives him a complete working nuclear warhead, which Baltar is *allowed to keep in his cabin*. The dialogue reduced to its Idiot Plot essence:

SCIENTIST: I need some plutonium.

IDIOT: Here, take this complete working nuclear warhead.

Baltar hands over the nuclear warhead to the Cylon spy; she detonates the device, destroying several spaceships and killing hundreds of people. Nuclear explosions have distinctive spectral characteristics that would have allowed Galactica's technicians to determine that the bomb that just exploded was one of theirs. Yet with the fleet in turmoil owing to a nuclear explosion in its midst and one warhead missing from the armory, *no one asks Baltar to prove he still has his bomb*. By the

end of the recently concluded season, Baltar has been elected president of the survivors' government. He orders that humanity's remnant stop fleeing the Cylons, settle on an undefended planet and essentially decommission their space warships. Everyone is too stupid to question this order, which OBVIOUSLY leaves the survivors helpless against another Cylon attack, which happens in the season finale. "Kept in motion solely by virtue of the fact that everybody involved is an idiot," indeed.

### **Size Does Matter**

Reader Jeremy Morse of Ypsilanti, Mich., notes that in a draft preview of cornerbacks, Vic Carucci of NFL.com declared 185-pound cornerback Tye Hill of Clemson "[lacks ideal size](#)". A few sentences later, Carucci said 189-pound cornerback Ashton Youtby of Ohio State has "good size." Yours truly adds that Scouts Inc. calls DT Brodrick Bunkley "undersized" at 309 pounds, DT Johnny Jolly "big" at 317 pounds. Jolly weighs 2 percent more than Bunkley. How can 2 percent represent the difference between "undersized" and "big?"

### **Senator, Your Corporate-Funded Private Jet Is Waiting to Take You to the Anti-Poverty Hearing**

After the Republicans' lobbying scandal, some in the Senate proposed rules that would require senators to pay the true cost when they use corporate jets. Currently, fat cats hoping to influence lawmakers can provide them with personal jets at artificially low prices. Sen. Dianne Feinstein, who opposes regulation of politicians' access to corporate jets, told Sheryl Gay Stolberg of the New York Times that on a single recent week, "I flew from Colorado to Los Angeles to San Diego to San Francisco to Sacramento, back to Los Angeles, to San Bernardino and back to San Francisco." Without a private jet at someone else's expense, Feinstein maintained, such a schedule would be impossible. Such a schedule *should* be impossible! It's hard to believe Sen. Feinstein was doing the people's business by jetting around so much, especially since she represents California, not Colorado. The schedule described above entails seven air trips in a single week -- how can Feinstein possibly get any real work done if she's constantly changing locations? Surely members of Congress of both parties like constantly jetting around in corporate-financed private aircraft because it makes them feel important, yet prevents them from being in any one location long enough to be expected to accomplish anything.

Senators also want private jets to avoid the madhouses that modern airports have become -- corporate aircraft dock at "general aviation" terminals far from the crowds and security lines. But senators ought to experience the same airport crowding and delays as endured by voters, rather than go straight to the front of the line like little pashas. Plus note Sen. Feinstein's schedule included the absurdity of flying from Los Angeles to San Bernardino, about an hour's drive. Members of the United States Senate would benefit from getting stuck in the traffic between Los Angeles and San Bernardino, experiencing what the typical Californian must, rather than flying above voters in corporate-funded luxury. Plus, how much corporate-funded senatorial flying is actually for fundraising? If restrictions on corporate jets made it harder for politicians to fund raise, that alone is a reason to force members of Congress to pay the true cost of travel.

### **Seventh-Round Forecast**

Compare to your boards! I'm going to get a lot of heat for forecasting Mike Brisiel to Carolina with choice No. 234, but if you can't take the heat you shouldn't be forecasting the seventh round. Next year I plan to market "TMQ's Seventh Round Draft Guide" for \$19.95 plus postage.

209. Cincinnati (from Houston): Chris Brammel, QB, Saint Francis of Indiana. *Draft guides list Brammel as 6-4 7/8, but scouts suspect he is really only 6-4 3/4.*

210. New Orleans: Evan Judge, WR, Colorado. *No male modeling experience.*
211. New Jersey Jets: Quinn Ojinnaka, G, Syracuse. *Weights 309 pounds, yet Scouts Inc. draft profile says he "lacks bulk."*
212. Miami (from Green Bay): Jamaal Fudge, S, Clemson.
213. San Francisco: LaJuan Ramsey, DT, USC. *LaJuan -- wasn't he a "Star Wars" character?*
214. Oakland: Adrian Ghent, CB, Troy State. *Wowed scouts at the combine with an 84.7 in relay Yahtzee.*
215. Tennessee: Steve Williams, DT, NW Missouri State.
216. Buffalo: Johnny Faulk, CB, Troy State. *Troy State prospects flying off the board.*
217. Detroit: Chris Morris, C, Michigan State.
218. Arizona: Javon Nanton, DE, Miami. *On recent trip to the grocery store, had three sacks.*
219. Baltimore: Jason Hatcher, DE, Grambling. *Has taken the shuttle from Washington to New York in less than 1 hour, 36 minutes.*
220. Philadelphia: Brett Basanez, QB, Northwestern. *In just 12 games last year, threw for more yards than all but eight NFL quarterbacks threw for in 16 games. Nevertheless, scouts think Basanez has a weak arm.*
221. St. Louis: Mike Espy, WR, Mississippi. *Promising career in sports television.*
222. Cleveland: Terrence Pennington, T, New Mexico.
223. Atlanta: Sean Conover, DE, Bucknell. [Bucknell athletes actually graduate](#) -- so it can be done, NCAA.
224. Dallas: Sir Henry Anderson, DT, Oregon State. *On dates, addresses women as "Dame."*
225. San Diego: Shawn Willis, FB, Oklahoma State.
226. Miami: Daniel Fells, TE, Cal Davis.
227. San Diego: Albert Mielsch, DT, Kentucky. *Finished first in the giant slalom at the combine.*
228. Kansas City: Connor Hughes, K, Virginia.
229. New England: JR Lemon, running back, Stanford. *Ran the 40 in .0008 seconds on a really fast surface at the Stanford Linear Accelerator .*
230. Washington: Tyler Ecker, TE, Michigan.
231. Cincinnati: Justin London, LB, UCLA. *Named after his parents were asked, "Where have you been recently?"*
232. New Jersey Giants: Charlie Peprah, S, Alabama. *Hometown draftniks at Radio City go ballistic that Giants take Peprah with Trey Tate still on the board.*
233. Miami: Trey Tate, DT, Clemson.
234. Carolina: Mike Brisiel, T, Colorado State.
235. Tampa: Jami Hightower, T, Texas A&M. *Though 6-4 and 364 pounds, Scouts Inc. calls his size only "adequate."*
236. San Francisco: Brett Bell, CB, Wisconsin. *Once scored 81 points while shooting baskets by himself.*

237. Carolina: John Busing, LB, Miami of Ohio. *TMQ loves fact that the existence of this school forces the Hurricane university to call itself Miami of Florida.*
238. Tennessee: Anthony Schlegel, LB, Ohio State.
239. Seattle: Melvin Oliver, DE, LSU. *Has great intangibles, though I can't quite put my finger on what they are.*
240. Pittsburgh: Willie Evans, DE, Mississippi State. *At combine, was able to rub his tummy and pat his nose while standing on one leg.*
241. Tampa: Matt Lentz, G, Michigan.
242. St. Louis: Nate Livings, G, LSU. *At private workout, did 34 reps of 225 pounds. Unfortunately since it was a private workout, no one saw.*
243. St. Louis: Tom Malone, P, USC. *Taking TMQ's advice, Rams shrewdly stockpiled late seventh-round picks.*
244. Tampa: Quinton Ganther, RB, Utah.
245. Tennessee: Dallas Baker, WR, Florida. *Impressed scouts with 40-yard time of 4.392409, though electronic timers had him at 4.393285.*
246. Tennessee: Bristol Olomua, TE, Texas Tech. *Another promising sports-television career.*
247. Detroit: Willie Smith, CB, Marshall. *Scouts praise him as a "cover corner." But then, there is no other kind of corner.*
248. Buffalo: Travis Leffew, T, Louisville.
249. Seattle: Jay McCareins, CB, Princeton. *Hopes his 40-yard dash time was calculated wrong by the College Board.*
250. Washington: Eric Bassey, CB, Oklahoma.
251. Houston: If you act before midnight tonight, you will receive a free tie clasp.
252. New Orleans: Jabari Levey, T, South Carolina. *At 312 pounds has "adequate bulk," according to Scouts Inc., raising the question of why a 309-pound offensive lineman is too small but three more pounds makes him big enough.*
253. Green Bay: Thomas Carroll, DE, Miami of Florida.
254. San Francisco: Chris Barclay, RB, Wake Forest.
255. Oakland: Mike Imoh, RB, Virginia Tech. *Shortest "Mr. Irrelevant" in history of award.*



Is Favre going with the turkey sandwich? With or without cheese?

**Next Week** On an *exclusive* basis, Brett Favre tells Tuesday Morning Quarterback he is "considering" having a turkey sandwich for lunch. (One column next Tuesday reviewing the draft, then in August, Tuesday Morning Quarterback resumes on a weekly basis as the NFL artificial universe revs up.)

**Tuesday, May 2, 2006**

**Updated: May 5, 5:00 PM ET**

Messing up your daggone top 10

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By Gregg Easterbrook

Will the mock draft now disappear from history? With Mario Williams going first, not only was every mock draft erroneous, no mock draft was accurate past the first pick! Mock drafts are always inaccurate by the fifth or sixth pick, since all it takes is one surprise to throw off every projected choice below. But in this case all mock drafts were wrong from the first pick on down.

So far as I can determine, not one single mock draft in the entire local space-time continuum had Williams first. (Actually, mine did, but I didn't finish my board until late Friday night.) Obviously people do mock drafts as a diversion from the fact they are desperate for football but there isn't any this time of year. Still, it set some kind of record for futility that with all the energy put into mock drafts by millions of sportswriters, bloggers and fantasy leaguers, everyone was completely wrong about everything.

Speaking of energy, yours truly attended the draft and was stunned by the amount of energy put into an event that has no meaning whatsoever to human history. Perhaps 1,000 media people were at Radio City Music Hall: most armed with laptop, Blackberry, Treo and at least one cell phone. Thousands of spectators attended, hundreds of event staff were present, many dozens of carpenters and stage crew worked on preparing the set. Three gigantic mobile television studios, the size of tractor-trailer rigs, were parked outside, along with satellite-uplink vans and a mysterious Illumination Dynamics truck mounting a device that appeared to be the shield generator Darth Vader positioned on the Endor moon. (The [mysterious vehicle](#) is the one on the right.) By dusk Friday, hundreds of New Yorkers began milling around outside Radio City, taking in the scene, as if something momentous were about to happen. Hey, it's just the NFL draft -- which not only has no meaning whatever to human history but also won't even have much effect on the next NFL season: three rookies started in the last Super Bowl. Yes, the NFL is a big business, but \$6 billion in revenue in 2005 is a blip on the corporate landscape. Last week General Electric, which had \$148 billion in 2005 revenue and whose status is essential to the future of the American economy, held its annual meeting. A thousand media people did not attend.

Yet the draft is great because it's democratizing. No one has the slightest idea what will happen, so all opinions are equally invalid. Hanging around the crowd at Radio City, I overheard emphatically expressed football views that were indistinguishable from those being offered by The Experts. And the fact that The Experts are constantly wrong is democratizing. For example, most draft experts had Winston Justice going in the first half of the first round; he went in the second round. How pleasant -- The Experts publicly wrong! That everyone's views are equally invalid is the best thing about the draft.

In news about news, one subject of debate within journalism circles is whether the "scoop" matters. Everyone wants to be first, of course, but how important is it to be first with something that everyone else will also report a short time later, if not within minutes? True scoops -- such as the New York Times reporting the Bush administration's unauthorized electronic surveillance, something no other news organization knew -- are significant. First-to-the-microphone scoops, where one reporter beats others by minutes, seem evanescent. Nevertheless John McClain of the

Houston Chronicle was, so far as I could determine, first with the scoop that the Texans would use the No. 1 pick on Williams. The Chronicle had this on its Web site at 8:20 p.m. ET the night before the draft. Adam Schefter of NFL Network barely missed being first, reporting this on air at 8:24 p.m. ET. Rachel Nichols of ESPN also barely missed being first, reporting it on air at 8:33 p.m. ET.

Tuesday Morning Quarterback has long been suspicious of cases in which two highly drafted players played similar positions on the same college team. In 1998, for example, quarterback Peyton Manning of Tennessee was a first-round choice, and wide receiver Marcus Nash of Tennessee also a first-round choice. Nash was a bust: Manning had made him look better than he was. Call it Nearby Nepotism -- beware of collegians who played near other good collegians. Nearby Nepotism ran wild at this year's draft. Ohio State linebacker A.J. Hawk went fifth, then Ohio State linebacker Bobby Carpenter went 18th -- most likely they made each other seem better. Three members of the Florida State front seven -- Ernie Sims, Kamerion Wimberly and Brodrick Bunkley -- went in the first 14 selections, and most likely made each other look better. The cake was taken when three of NC State's four defensive linemen went in the first 26 selections. NC State had a 6-5 record -- if its D-line was so fabulous, how come the team barely broke .500? Buffalo used the 26th overall choice on defensive tackle John McCargo, who lined up next to the top overall choice, Williams. Most likely Williams made McCargo look better than he is. Or maybe McCargo made Williams



Amid the bustle of reporters, team GMs and anxious players is the Draft Goddess.

look better than he is: either way someone is in for disappointment. Yours truly is guessing that of the trio of teams that took Florida State frontline defenders (Cleveland, Philadelphia and San Diego) and the trio that drafted NC State defensive linemen (Houston, Buffalo and San Francisco), many will soon be asking themselves, "How come this guy doesn't look as good as he did in college?"

See below for my team-by-team analysis.

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**What If You Offered to Trade Down for Nothing and Couldn't Get a Deal?** Researchers Richard Thaler of the University of Chicago and Cade Massey of Yale got some ink for a study suggesting [low NFL draft picks are worth more than high picks](#) because the high picks get huge bonuses that crush a team's salary cap. The NFL draft system actually penalizes losing clubs by awarding them top picks, the researchers maintained, because on average highly drafted players are overpriced compared to what they accomplish.

Tuesday Morning Quarterback is suspicious of this finding. If a high choice actually is worth less than a low choice, why don't teams with high choices simply swap them for low choices? Many teams with high first-round picks want to "trade down" but cannot find a trading partner offering anything enticing. Presumably a team would have no trouble trading down if it offered a high pick even-up for a low pick. Yet in actual draft practice, teams absolutely never trade down for nothing in return. Teams with high picks could also simply pass on their selection, allowing the next team to go on the clock and effectively lowering draft position. In the first round, each slot adds roughly \$1 million to a player's guarantees. So if a team drafting, say, 12th simply failed to choose for three consecutive clock periods, converting its choice to 15th, that team would save around \$3 million in bonuses. Yet no team Saturday simply passed on its chance to select. Failing to choose while on the

clock has happened only a couple times in NFL draft annals, and that turned out to be a faux pas, not a plan to reduce bonuses.

Thus Thaler's and Massey's paper seem to me another instance of abstract academic theory that ignores how people and organizations behave in the real world. 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 low picks. That NFL clubs *never* offer a straight exchange of high picks for low picks suggests they perceive this not to be in their self-interest, and it can't be that every one of 32 NFL teams fails to grasp its own self-interest. Perhaps teams calculate that the bad press and fan anger that would be incurred by deliberate sacrifice of high picks would outweigh any salary-cap leverage gained. In their paper, Thaler and Massey don't address the value of public relations. Public relations is an economic good and one of considerable worth to organizations in the entertainment business, such as sports teams.

If there is an NFL club following the Thaler-Massey prescription, it's the Broncos. In 2005, Denver swapped its first choice to Washington for a 2005 third and a 2006 first -- thus discarding a first-round bonus obligation in 2005. That left Denver with two first-round selections in April, and the Broncos traded one to San Francisco for second- and third-round selections, again freeing themselves of a first-round bonus. OK, Thaler and Massey, I'll give you that Denver seems to have nodded to your hypothesis. But I want to see a big trend of teams actively unloading first-round picks before I'll concede the real-world value of this line of thought, especially since Denver later shifted gears and traded up its remaining 2006 first-rounder. Also, the Broncos may simply be spooked by the first round. Of Denver's last dozen first-round choices, Mike Croel, Tommy Maddox, Willie Middlebrooks and Marcus Nash were busts, while Ashley Lelie and Deltha O'Neal were disappointments in one way or another. Six of the last 12 first-rounders bad picks -- ouch.

**Legitimate Sports-Related Excuse for Pictures of Nearly Naked Women:** NBC insisted the Winter Olympics occurred in "Torino, Italy." Organizers wanted the city designated Torino, not the anglicized Turin. But Italians don't call their nation Italy, they call it Italia. As reader Patrick Roche of Alexandria, Va., pointed out, "Torino, Italy" mixed languages. Munich is called Muenchen by Germans; here, tourists may purchase an "eco-friendly [Munich welcome card](#)." The eco-friendly city should be "Munich, Germany" in English and "Muenchen, Deutschland" in German. Calling it "Muenchen, Germany" would be lame -- same as calling the city of the Olympics "Torino, Italy," rather than "Turin, Italy" or "Torino, Italia."

I mention this not for grammar-snob reasons but to create a perfectly legitimate excuse for the ESPN.com art department to add pictures of the women's ice dancers at Torino. Isabelle Delobel of France wore little more than glued-on rhinestones above the waist, ditto for Barbara Poli of Spain. Elena Grushina of Ukraine wore so little she appeared to be a Vegas stripper most of the way through her act; the Washington Post dubbed hers the "sluttiest costume" at the Olympics. Not that TMQ has anything against strippers or slutty attire -- to everything, there is a season! But the Olympic event in question is a competition of dancing, not of disrobing. Plus, female and nontraditional male spectators have every right to complain that if the women perform nearly topless, the men should perform shirtless. Why not solve the problem for future Olympics by mandating that ice dancers perform in plain leotards? That would avoid the preposterous outfits and tittering about same; also, fit women look really sexy in leotards, so it accomplishes the marketing goal, too.



Welcome to TMQ's new favorite Olympic sport: ice stripping!

**Frequent Flyer Pick of the Year:** Choice No. 93 was held by four teams -- traded from Denver to Atlanta to Green Bay to St. Louis. There were 23 total trades of the 33 choices in the third round. Of the 32 NFL clubs, only Arizona simply went 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 with its original picks.

**In Space, No One Can Hear You Yawn:** I took the Official Kids of TMQ to the Smithsonian's new [National Air and Space Museum](#) near Dulles Airport in Virginia. We saw lots of planes, including an SR-71 and, poignantly, the Enola Gay. We watched the Imax movie "[Roving Mars](#)" -- "Presented as a Public Service by Lockheed Martin" -- about the Red Planet rovers Spirit and Opportunity. But wait, "[Roving Mars](#)" depicts sound in space! This flick, blessed by NASA and featured at the Smithsonian, has an animated scene in which the rocket propelling the Mars probes has left Earth's atmosphere yet makes lots of loud noises as its engines fire and its fairings disengage. The noises add to the Imax theatrical touch, since Imax theaters have *lots* of bass. But even my 11-year-old, Spenser, leaned over and whispered, "Dad, I thought there was no sound in outer space." If the Smithsonian can't get this kind of detail right, how can we believe its exhibits are accurate?

The Spirit and Opportunity rovers are still operating, two years after they were expected to expire; check out the [latest views from the Martian surface](#). The most important news from Mars this month comes from the European Space Agency's spacecraft Mars Express, in orbit around the Red Planet. Analysts, led by Jean-Pierre Bibring, are convinced readings from the Mars Express show there was liquid water flowing on Mars; substances called phyllosilicates, detected in Martian rocks, are thought to form only in the presence of liquid water. Note the European Space Agency's own Web site shows a picture of a NASA rover and [identifies it as Mars Express](#). The Mars Express is a satellite orbiting Mars; this mission did have a small rover, [but it crashed](#). Hey ESA, fact-check your Web site!



Can you hear me now?

Here's the rub, unmentioned in news coverage of the Mars water finding: Readings suggest liquid water last flowed on Mars 3.5 billion years ago, and has not done so since. How could this have happened? An essential aspect of Earth's geologic history is the "faint sun" problem. When the Earth formed, about 4.5 billion years ago, our star, Sol, gave off less heat and light than today. It is thought that for much of the early eons, Earth was a snowball, because the sun's heat was insufficient to melt water on our world. Gradually solar output increased as the material of our star compressed; somewhere around a billion years ago, Sol began emitting as much heat as it does today, the Earth warmed, and complex life followed. But if Earth was a snowball 3.5 billion years ago how could Mars, much farther away from the sun, have been warm enough for flowing water?

**Note one:** TMQ loves that the new Air and Space Museum is named the Steven F. Udvar-Hazy Center, after the aircraft-leasing millionaire who donated seed money for the facility. It's not just the Steven Udvar-Hazy Center, it's the Steven F. Udvar-Hazy Center. Oh, so you mean *that* Steven Udvar-Hazy!

**Note two:** Jacqueline Trescott of the Washington Post recently reported that Smithsonian Secretary Lawrence Small is [paying himself \\$813,000 per year](#). The Smithsonian's secretary has virtually no responsibilities, other than deciding what to order for lunch, since the location and use of Smithsonian facilities is determined by Congress. The Smithsonian boss experiences none of the business risk that may justify high pay to public-company CEOs, since the Smithsonian holds a government-granted monopoly and exists on federal subsidies. Here is the Smithsonian's fiscal [2007 budget request to Congress](#); in it the Smithsonian asks federal taxpayers for \$644 million in subsidies, including \$537 million for salaries. So federal taxpayers with a median family income of \$53,692 are having their pockets picked to give Lawrence Small \$813,000 a year, 15 times the median income of the taxpayers. Why isn't this viewed as white-collar crime?

**Conservationists Rarely Observe the Media Feeding in Their Natural State:** During commercial breaks at Radio City Music Hall, a woman hired by the NFL attempted to assuage the barbarians in the crowd by interviewing NFL players present. (Sorry, on repeated attempts I was unable to learn the woman's name.) When she interviewed Amani Toomer, the Giants' receiver explained his first name means "peace" in Swahili. The interviewer promptly asked, "Were your parents Swahili?" Donate here to the [Kamusi Project](#), an attempt to create an online English-Swahili translation program.

The lunchroom for ESPN and NFL staff was on the ninth floor of Radio City, in an area accessible only via a 19th-century style "stage elevator" built to bring actors and musicians from their dressing rooms to the proscenium. Passageways to the stage elevator were 19th-century narrow. The lithe Rockettes must have trouble squeezing through these passageways; it was hilarious to watch enormous former NFL types trying to negotiate them. Anyway, I learned the lunchroom was on the ninth floor by first going to the general media lunch area. The guard said, "Sir, ESPN is feeding on the ninth floor." *Feeding?* I worried I would get there and find a carrion, with Trey Wingo and Michael Irvin circling around.

The new network contracts allowed NFL Network to broadcast the draft, breaking ESPN's decades-long exclusive. Sets for Chris Berman's and Rich Eisen's competing desks were arranged so neither would see the other in the background. The ESPN and NFL Network audio was broadcast throughout Radio City, and media were invited to listen on radios. It seemed ESPN was playing only on frequency 104, while NFL Network was playing on all other frequencies. Yours truly suspected NFL Network was employing some jamming device to block the ESPN signal; maybe there was an electronic warfare drone circling around Radio City, broadcasting "spoof" signals. Seeing ESPN and NFL Network presenting the draft simultaneously made me wonder what will

happen in 2011, when the television master contracts expire. Right now ESPN is light years better than NFL Network. I flipped back and forth between the two during the draft.

Bloopers are inevitable. In mid-afternoon, Chris Berman interviewed Herm Edwards. The draftniks at Radio City, most of them wearing Jets jerseys, noticed and began lusty booing. Over on NFL Network, Rich Eisen declared, "The booing you hear is because New England is on the clock. Jets fans don't like New England." New England had been on the clock nine minutes at that point. Eisen might simply not have known why spectators were suddenly booing.

**True draft fact No. 1:** Media interviews with players were held in a makeshift area set up in a Radio City hall where the sculptor William Zorach's "Spirit of the Dance" is the centerpiece. "Spirit of the Dance" depicts a gigantic naked woman with "perky nipples," as the "Sex and the City" heroines would say. Yours truly found it entertaining to watch draft choices, family members of draftees and agents screaming into cell phones as they crowded around the statue, all of them, so far as I could tell, totally oblivious to it.

**True draft fact No. 2:** Not only were the Rockettes not present, Radio City's fabled Mighty Wurlitzer, the largest theatrical pipe organ ever constructed, was not used. This 4,410-pipe instrument was built in 1932 in the old Wurlitzer factory in North Tonawanda, N.Y., near my boyhood home. As a child, I often bicycled past the [Wurlitzer factory](#), which closed in 1983. The Mighty Wurlitzer was this company's greatest product and is capable not just of roller-rink sounds but of producing the full range of symphonic music. It was a sign of the dumbing-down of mass culture that the NFL held its draft in Radio City Music Hall, location of one of the most renowned musical instruments that exists in the world, and never switched on that great instrument.



Couldn't somebody have played some show tunes on the Mighty Wurlitzer?

Think of organ crescendos from 4,410 pipes as the commissioner approaches the podium! Instead, low-quality, ear-splitting, swelling electronic sounds like you hear at amusement parks were played the entire day, the same numbing recording over and over and over again. The draft must have cost \$10 million to stage; they couldn't hire an organist?

**TMQ to ESPN Auditors -- Please Approve My Expense Account for Fact-Finding Trip to Oslo:** ["Norwegians lead the world in casual sex,"](#) a study asserts. Surely the Norwegian Tourism Board will extensively promote this finding! In the past year, "Seven out of 10 Norwegians have had a random sex partner, and the nation is among the top of the list for one-night stands." What, exactly, is a "random sex partner?" You don't even know who the other person is? Key additional finding: "Norwegians are also among the least sexually satisfied in the world." So those Norway types get more spur-of-the-moment sex with strangers than you or I, but it doesn't make them happy. Why does this not come as a surprise?

**Fact-Finding Trip to Belgium Is My Backup Request:** Researchers at the University of Leuven in Belgium recently announced a study suggesting [men lose their financial bargaining edge](#) after they have seen beautiful women. Volunteers played a wagering game in which a participant could either gamble for big winnings, running a risk of obtaining nothing, or fold and accept a medium return. Most men gambled for big winnings. Then half the group was shown pictures of babes in lingerie, the other half photographs of landscapes. When the game resumed, the men who had been

gawking at pretty women lost their focus and began to agree to whatever offer was on the table, while the men who had seen the landscape photography kept playing for big wins. Isn't the NFL implication here obvious? When men are considering a season-ticket purchase, first invite them to peruse the cheerleader swimsuit calendar, then give them the season-ticket order form.

**Mel Kiper Watch:** A man who makes his living obsessing about the NFL draft -- only in America! Though Kiper is often lampooned, the day ESPN put him on the air was an important day in football annals. First, Kiper's example allowed millions of Americans to come out as draftniks. At this time of year, very large numbers of people have intense, strongly held convictions regarding football prospects they may never have seen perform. Mel's example made it all right to be a draftnik -- the man makes his living talking about this stuff! Everybody laughs at Mel's hair, but deep down, there are significant numbers who wish they could exchange occupations with Kiper. And I don't mean just miners or stevedores who would trade places with Mel in order to exchange dangerous or exhausting work for sitting in an air-conditioned office. Many doctors, lawyers and business managers would trade occupations with Kiper in a New York minute, because a huge number of Americans simply love the draft, and Kiper lives in the draftnik world 365 days a year.

Kiper is significant in another way, too. His example made it OK for men (and, increasingly, women) to admit they are *totally obsessed* with football. Obsessed is the key word. Before Kiper, people watched NFL or college games, and maybe the occasional highlight show, and now and then absentmindedly thumbed through a football annual. Kiper made it OK to be *obsessed* about football, to watch every last game that's on, to read every last sentence that's written, to pore over stats and tapes. In this sense, Mel Kiper Jr. has made a greater positive contribution to the incredible financial success of the National Football League than all but a few people in broadcasting. Watching him on his perch at Radio City on Saturday, I reflected on the fact that the respectable media and football worlds refuse to honor Kiper: he's too out-there, too goofy. Yet many respectable-media types who snicker at Kiper privately know he has accomplished more than they have. His was a central role in the last two decades of the promotion of professional and college football, helping inspire round-the-clock viewing and, now, round-the-clock Internet following. And Kiper has been a populist influence, expressing in his own inimitable way this message: anyone can figure this stuff out, The Experts don't know anything you can't know. I say in full seriousness that someone needs to give Mel Kiper an award. Think what you will about the pompadour: Kiper's contribution to broadening the base of public interest in football exceeds that of most famed broadcasters and sportswriters and of most NFL executives, for that matter.

These things said, part of the fun of Kiper is watching him be all over the map. This year he issued five mock drafts, each contradicting the one before. Mel had the Dolphins going first for Winston Justice, or Ashton Youboty, or Donte Whitner, or Antonio Cromartie; they actually used their first selection on Jason Allen. "If Justice is available, he has got to be the call for Miami," Mel foresaw; Justice was available and was not the call.

Kiper had the Bucs going first for Cromartie, or Marcus McNeill, or Chad Greenway; they actually used their first-rounder on Davin Joseph. Kiper had Dallas investing its first choice on Jason Allen, or Chad Jackson, or Manny Lawson; the Cowboys chose Bobby Carpenter. Kiper had DeAngelo Williams going as high as 10th or as low as 22nd, being picked by Arizona or New England or Denver; Williams went 27th to Carolina. Kiper had Tamba Hali going as high as 12th to Cleveland or as low as the second round; he went 20th to Kansas City. On March 6, Kiper predicted Oakland would use the seventh overall choice on quarterback Jay Cutler; on March 27, Kiper said "it would be odd" if Oakland used its first pick on a quarterback. (Oakland passed on Cutler.) With its first pick, Jacksonville "could go one of two ways, Thomas Howard or Deuce Lutui." Both were available when Jax picked, and the team went a third way. At various points, Mel had the Chargers taking Tye Hill or Justice or Jonathan Joseph or Santonio Holmes; San Diego took Cromartie. At various points Kiper predicted the Eagles would take Justice or Holmes or Jackson or Ernie Sims or Greenway; they took Brodrick Bunkley. Surely if any one of his multiple forecasts for any of these teams had been correct, Mel would have claimed to have predicted it!



Odds are 100 to 1 that none of the media "experts" knew that San Diego was going to pick Cromartie.

Kiper's player comments are similarly all over the map. Davin Joseph was chosen in the first round; two months before the draft, Mel said Joseph "has a chance to be a second-round pick." Mark Anderson: "He could be a second-round pick." Anderson went in the fifth round. A month before the draft, Kiper called Kellen Clemens "a late-round possibility." Then Kiper forecast Clemens as a second-round choice. As Clemens was chosen in the second round, by Jersey/B (aka the Jets), Kiper said, "That's a little high for Clemens, considering Brodie Croyle is still available." In his own final mock, Mel had Clemens going before Croyle. When Detroit took Daniel Bullocks early in round two, Kiper said, "That's where I thought for him, early round two." In all his mock drafts, Mel had Bullocks going either late round two or below the second round. Kiper predicted of Denver's first choice, "They could get a wide receiver or running back. Their key area is defensive end." Denver used its first choice on a quarterback. The Panthers, Kiper said, "would be hard-pressed to pass on Mercedes Lewis." They passed on Mercedes Lewis. For the Titans to choose Matt Leinart would be "a no-brainer." The Titans passed on Leinart. Of course there are hundreds of prospects, and Kiper was exactly right about some of their destinations: he forecast Nick Mangold to the Jets with the 29th selection, for example. But Kiper makes draft predictions the way Kobe Bryant takes shots: they both launch so many that one or two have to fall. My favorite Kiperism this year? When Donte Whitner went eighth overall, Mel said, "That's about right. I had him going 16th to Miami, but that's still about right." Kiper did have Whitner going 16th to Miami -- in a January mock. The day before the draft, he forecast Whitner to Cincinnati at the 24th slot. Kiper couldn't keep his own predictions straight. And who could blame him?

**TMQ Continues to Advocate a Stadium Named "Your Trademark Here Stadium":** What a relief the NFL and its players signed a new collective bargaining agreement, which TMQ will analyze in detail when this column resumes in earnest in August. The only teams to vote against the CBA were Buffalo and Cincinnati, both low-grossing franchises that believe -- falsely, in all likelihood -- they won't be able to compete against high-grossing franchises as the salary cap skyrockets. In many areas of life, the key question is "compared to what?" The new CBA may not

lend Green Bay, Jacksonville and other small-market teams as much financial help as might have been ideal. But -- compared to what? The wealthy teams might have insisted on giving small-market teams nothing, or might have torpedoed any CBA in order to have uncapped years that would have clobbered the small-market bloc. Instead the wealthy teams agreed to share more with the little guys -- quite statesmanlike on the part of Dallas, Denver, Houston, New England, Washington and other high-revenue franchises.

Owners of some of high-grossing teams grouched that Buffalo and Cincinnati complained of insufficient transfer payments while both decline to sell stadium names to corporate buyers. If they need more revenue, the wealthy owners ask, why don't they sell like we did? Despite the impression that everything in pro sports is for sale, roughly half of NFL franchises have either never sold the stadium name or sold it once and then taken the name back. The Bears (Soldier Field), Bengals (Paul Brown Stadium), Bills (Ralph Wilson Stadium), Browns (Cleveland Browns Stadium), Cardinals (Sun Devil Stadium), Chiefs (Arrowhead Stadium), Cowboys (Texas Stadium), Dolphins (Dolphin Stadium), Falcons (Georgia Dome), Giants (Giants Stadium), Jets (Meadowlands Stadium), Packers (Lambeau Field), Saints (Superdome), Titans (The Coliseum) and Vikings (Hubert Humphrey Metrodome) lack stadium-name income. Some of these, such as the Browns and both New Jersey clubs, are high-grossing teams, showing that even the marketing-obsessed don't necessarily sell everything. Teams on the unsullied list may end up with corporate-named stadia, pending the details of new-facility projects; although any chance the Chicago facility would be renamed Soldier Field by Marshall Fields expired when the sinister Federated Department Stores holding company announced it would abolish the Marshall Fields brand. Anyway, it's not just fussy traditionalists who decline to sell their stadium names: a significant number of NFL franchises have said no sale to corporate sponsors.

True, only Buffalo has a stadium named for its current owner. The new crowd of max-marketing owners such as Robert McNair and Daniel Snyder have a point when they note Wilson wants them to share the wealth in part so that he can keep his stadium named after himself; while if Snyder or McNair named their teams' fields after themselves, they would be accused of egotism. The point that can be made in Wilson's corner involves succession. Wilson may leave the team to his wife Mary, engaging no estate tax, or to his daughters, which would involve them borrowing to pay the estate tax. In either case, if the franchise stays in the family, Mary or the daughters would be deeply hesitant to move the team away from a stadium named for Ralph. Whereas if the place were named Call Now for Papa John's Spicy Buffalo Wings Stadium, there would be no sentimental attachment and new Bills management might say, "Los Angeles, here we come." Ralph Wilson choose the stadium name in part to increase the odds the Bills remain in Buffalo after his death, a point that isn't widely known.

Yours truly loves (and slightly knows) Ralph Wilson, but lobbied for the Orchard Park facility to be named Robert Kalsu Field. The sole American professional athlete who died in uniform during the Vietnam War, Kalsu voluntarily left the Bills in order to serve his country, surrendering an exemption. Whatever you thought of the Vietnam War, there is no higher patriotism than to serve voluntarily from the sense of duty, not owing to conscription. Though I wish the Bills' facility were named for Kalsu, the fieldhouse adjoining Wilson Stadium is now Robert Kalsu Fieldhouse, and a statue at the stadium stands in his honor. That's pretty good when you take into account that Kalsu died before the 24-7 cable era -- 99 percent of those who follow sports have never so much as heard his name. Which brings us to the question of a man whose name definitely has been heard. The new football facility rising in Glendale, Ariz., has the working designation Cardinals Stadium. If on

dedication day its name is not Pat Tillman Field, the Cardinals franchise, and the whole National Football League, should be ashamed.

**Disclaimer Watch:** Recently, yours truly signed on to a high-speed Internet connection in a Westin hotel and first had to click "accept" to 1,025 words of verbiage presented in all-caps, apparently to discourage anyone from actually reading it. Basically the agreement specified I would not use the hotel's Internet connection to take over the world. The statement included such provisions as, "You shall be prohibited from usage that infringes any patent, trademark, trade secret, copyright, right of publicity or other proprietary right of any party." But I'm already prohibited -- everything mentioned in the sentence is illegal, and the fact that something is illegal is a more powerful restriction than that it's mentioned in an unread disclaimer.

**Disclaimer bonus!** Recently, yours truly signed in at Google headquarters in Mountain View, Calif., to visit a Google executive.

The sign-in required me to click "accept" to a lengthy disclaimer which I had no way of copying to find the amusing sentence that must have been in there somewhere. And recently I registered for TimesPoints, the affinity program of the august New York Times. (That's the august newspaper, not an August edition.) The disclaimer was 19 paragraphs long and could not be printed or copied; which is to say, the New York Times wanted to make it impossible for you to keep a record of what you agreed to. One stipulation the Times didn't want you to be able to copy: "Any use of your assigned user ID or password will be assumed to be your use." That means if someone hacks your password it is your problem, not their problem.



Before you enter the pearly gates, make sure you sign the 50-page disclaimer.

**Disclaimer double bonus!** The disclaimer on the back of my NFL-issued press pass for Saturday's draft at Radio City Music Hall declared, "Holder assumes all risk pertaining to use." It's *dangerous* to attend the draft?

**Being Paid Not to Want Someone -- If Only Dates Worked This Way:** Baltimore, drafting 13th, traded with Cleveland, drafting 12th; the two teams swapped positions, the Ravens giving the Browns a sixth-round choice as payment. Baltimore then drafted Haloti Ngata. Essentially Baltimore gave Cleveland a sixth-round selection in return for the Browns agreeing not to select Ngata.

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#### Team-by-Team Analysis-Like-Substance

**Atlanta:** In two of the last four drafts, Atlanta traded its first-round choice for a player another team "franchised" solely for the purpose of unloading -- Peerless Price and now John Abraham. In each case the original employers of these gentlemen were not planning to invite them back. Price was a bust in Georgia. Now the Falcons have duplicated the model.

**Arizona:** Had he come out in 2005, Matt Leinart would have been the top overall choice, gone to glamorous San Francisco and gotten a monster contract. Instead he was true to his school and returned for his senior season, now goes 10th to the woeful Cards and will get a medium-sized contract. Leinart took the most expensive ballroom dancing class in history!

**Baltimore:** Arriving at their assigned team desk near the front of Radio City Music Hall, Ravens' officials said, "What are these?" They were puzzled by the strange devices on every team desk. The strange devices, which Baltimore officials had never seen, were regular landline telephones.

**Buffalo:** Since 1990, Buffalo has had 17 first-round draft picks; the team has used seven on defensive backs, versus five on linemen of all types. Buffalo seems addicted to drafting skinny guys: this may explain why the Bills were consistently blown off the ball on both sides of the line in 2005. Once again it was Skinny City on draft day as Buffalo went first for a safety, then used three of its first four selections on defensive backs. The Bills, having one of the league's worst offensive lines, ended 2005 with waiver-wire acquisitions starting at both offensive tackles -- yet signed no OT in the offseason and did not choose one in the draft until the fifth round. Eric Mangini, product of the New England success system, took over the Jets and at the top of the draft immediately went offensive line, offensive line. It's a winning formula. Endlessly drafting skinny guys who get clobbered because there is no one in the trenches is not a winning formula.

**Carolina:** "A new sophistication is sweeping across the city," the New York Times [pronounced in March of Charleston](#). Hey Claude, did you just feel something sweep across the city? The newspaper's evidence of sweeping Carolina change: a recently opened suspension bridge and the Carolinas' inaugural Food and Wine Festival, which attracted 5,000. "Food experts came from across the South to size up the situation, and many were impressed," the newspaper reported. "Food experts" converge! The Times especially praised an expensive Charleston restaurant for its "classic low-country combination of pork and shellfish in the form of intensely piggy guanciale, made from hog jowls." Intensely piggy?

**Chicago:** The Bears used their first two selections on cornerbacks. This was sensible since, against Steve Smith in the playoffs, Chicago appeared to be playing without any cornerbacks.

**Cincinnati:** Third-round choice Frostee Rucker of USC is the first choice in Bengals annals to be named after a frozen confection. "Now that there is Bengals candy, [we really wanted to get Frostee too](#)," Marvin Lewis said.

**Cleveland:** The Browns and Saints essentially exchanged centers. Center LeCharles Bentley of New Orleans signed with Cleveland as a free agent and center Jeff Faine of Cleveland went to New Orleans in a draft-day swap. Hmm -- this is a totally straight football comment, what's it doing in TMQ?

**Dallas:** When I look at the Cowboys' roster since Troy Aikman retired, I have not seen a premium quarterback. When I've looked at Cowboys' rosters since Jerry Jones bought the team, I have not seen a premium young quarterback in waiting. (Aikman was already there when Jones made his purchase.) And when I looked at the list of Dallas choices in the 2006 draft, I did not see a premium young quarterback. Or any quarterback. How might Matt Leinart have looked in silver and blue? He was there for the taking at a reasonable cost in trade-up terms.

**Denver:** The orange-clad Broncos should have tabbed Kate Mosse, founder, [the Orange Prize](#), a British award for novels written by women. Presumably, a novel by a woman about the Denver Broncos would include lengthy scenes of women discussing regret, disappointment, loss, hidden family secrets and repressed anger about the Broncos' performance in the AFC title game.

**Detroit:** Why didn't the Lions draft a CEO or a management consultant from McKinsey? Since Matt Millen took over in 2001, Detroit has the worst record in the NFL; and Millen did not inherit a loser, rather, a 9-7 Lions squad that had just barely missed the playoffs. Millen sure turned the Detroit program around! Tuesday Morning Quarterback continues to wonder what weird hold Millen has over the Ford family, which just awarded Millen a contract extension. In five years under him the Lions' best finish is 6-10, yet Millen hasn't been fired. Does Millen have the negatives of photographs of the Ford family driving BMWs?

**Green Bay:** The Packers have the most cap space in the league, yet have done little in free agency. Green Bay is also the NFL's sole publicly owned team, meaning management has fiduciary responsibility to stockholders. Can it be that Pack management has concluded its fiduciary duty is to cut costs and maximize profit? Lambeau Field will sell out every game even if the Packers go 0-16.

**Houston:** Yeah yeah, they passed on Reggie Bush. Yeah yeah, "strictly a football decision." No one has the slightest idea which drafted players will be good. If you knew for sure Reggie would be the next Gale Sayers, then of course you'd take Bush; if you knew for sure Mario Williams would be the next Bruce Smith, then of course you'd take Williams. But you don't know -- you're guessing all the way. What TMQ liked about the Texans' draft was the first and second choices of the third round were both good-looking offensive linemen. Houston, Jersey/B, Philadelphia and Tampa were the teams that emphasized offensive line in this year's draft. Prediction: Houston, Jersey/B, Philadelphia and Tampa will improve their records.

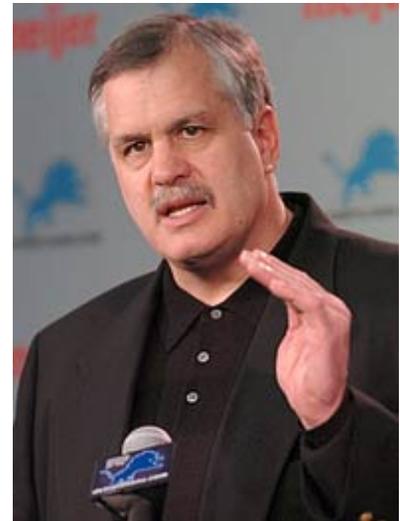
**Indianapolis:** It's less than six months since the Colts were glistening at 13-0 and widely described, by serious sports observers, as an unstoppable colossus that would become the first-ever 19-0 perfect team. That was less than six months ago. How much did you hear about the Colts over draft weekend? Do your football-nut friends ever even mention the Colts anymore? It's like Indianapolis has ceased to exist.

**Jacksonville:** Worried about being a low-revenue team under the newly increased salary cap, the Jaguars will begin charging players per cup of Gatorade -- so they drink the whole cup, rather than drinking some, tossing it away and taking a fresh cup later. Also, to cut photocopy costs, game plans will be recycled.

**Kansas City:** Remember that huge push the Chiefs made last year to improve their defense? Well, Kansas City was 31st in defense in 2004 and 25th in 2005. The huge push didn't amount to much. This is still a team that must outscore you because it can't stop you.

**Miami:** The Dolphins looked good at the end of 2005. They're also becoming the NFL's soap-opera team -- drug suspensions, domestic court, Quarterback of the Day, road-rage incidents, a coach who wears Panama hats. Why isn't there a reality show based on the Dolphins? Plus, it could have bikini beach scenes. Note the team just renamed its facility [Dolphin Stadium](#), not Dolphins Stadium. Maybe this is an attempt to restart the old fad for singular football names, such as Chicago Fire (WFL, 1970s) and Denver Gold (USFL, 1980s).

**Minnesota:** Two seasons ago, Daunte Culpepper to Randy Moss was the most feared battery in the league. Now the gentlemen have been traded for Troy Williamson and Napoleon Harris, both third



Where would Matt Millen go in a mock draft of NFL GMs? We say No. 32.

string on the [Vikings' depth chart](#), plus a draft choice that just became rookie Ryan Cook. These are looking like some of the worst trades since Russia's Baron Edouard de Stoeckl sent Alaska to William Seward for \$7.2 million and an archipelago to be named later.

**New England:** They must be worried in Foxborough because for the first time since the Belichick success system took hold, the Patriots did not trade down to bank extra choices for next year. It was "smoke 'em if you've got 'em" in the New England draft room. Last week TMQ noted the Patriots have the NFL's first official team Web site in Chinese. Here, in Mandarin, are the vitals on [Patriots' cheer-babe Jie Ralls](#), born in Shanghai.



The Patriots think global.

**New Jersey Giants:** Last year the G-Men played nine home games and seven road dates; the unprecedented schedule favor helped put them into the playoffs. This happened because the early Giants-at-Saints contest was rescheduled to the Meadowlands after Hurricane Katrina hit the Big Easy. Now the 2006 sked is out, and it lists Saints at Giants. Pairings are determined years in advance via a formula. But why wasn't this game shifted to New Orleans, so Jersey/A could in 2006 play seven home games and nine road dates, atoning for its 2005 windfall?

**New Jersey Jets:** The Radio City crowd was 80 percent Jets draftniks. The commissioner comes to the podium with the fourth selection and Matt Leinart available. The Jets choose D'Brickshaw Ferguson, and Radio City *does not shake with boos*. Sure, Ferguson is a Long Island product, though the Jets just abandoned Long Island, moving their headquarters to New Jersey. *Jets draftniks did not boo the Jets' first choice*. Is there a doctor in the house? The Jets had a second selection in the first round, with glamour boys such as Chad Jackson available, and chose another offensive lineman. Again Jets draftniks cheered wildly. Are these pod people from another planet substituted for real Jets fans? Tuesday Morning Quarterback was impressed that the Jets' faithful were sophisticated enough to cheer for offensive linemen. And TMQ thinks the Jets had a magnificent draft, in no small part because they put blockers first. Eric "I Was a Teenaged Coach" Mangini is giving notice he has the New England success formula down -- substance, not style. Mangini even banked an extra second-round choice for 2007, again following the New England success formula of trading down annually in the middle rounds to add extra choices, and thus extra ammunition, for next year.

**New Orleans:** Between Reggie Bush and the revival of the Superdome, Monday Night, Sept. 25, has become must-see TV. And oh look, how convenient -- ESPN has the game! Mark your shared Web calendar now. What, you don't know about [shared Web calendars](#)? You are a full 72 hours behind the technology curve.

**Oakland:** The Raiders have spent five of their last eight first-round picks on defensive backs, versus two on linemen of all types. Oakland, like Buffalo, seems addicted to drafting skinny guys: this may explain why the Raiders were consistently blown off the ball on both sides of the line in 2005. In recent seasons Buffalo and Oakland have both gone Skinny City on draft day, ignoring linemen, then both had bad years. Now, could these data points possibly be related?

**Philadelphia:** The Eagles, at the cutting edge of cheerleader cheesecake, drafted receiver/male model Jeremy Bloom, who's at the cutting edge of athletic beefcake. Bloom has shown the world as much of himself as have the Philadelphia cheer-babes in their annual three-ounces-of-fabric lingerie calendars. Now Philadelphia has its glamorous cheerleaders to exhibit to men, and Bloom to exhibit to women and nontraditional males. Why do I think this was the first NFL draft choice dictated by the marketing department?

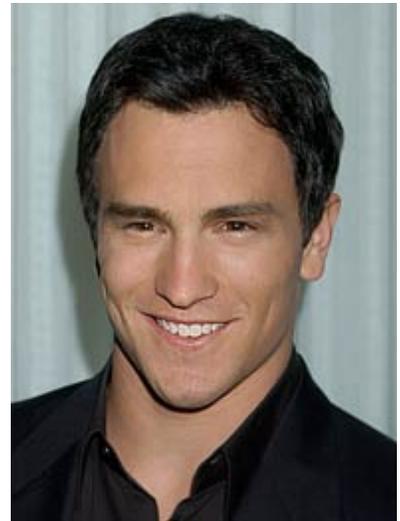
**Pittsburgh:** It's tough being on top. There's intense pressure. Everything feels like it's constantly boiling up. It's really tough being on top. I'm not referring to the Steelers' defending-champion status. I'm referring to Bill Cowher's baseball cap.

**San Diego:** In the first round the Bolts took Antonio Cromartie, despite his having just one start in college. In 1992, Johnnie Mitchell went in the first round despite not starting in college, and you remember how well that worked out. Antonio, here's some free advice: don't wear sunglasses indoors during television interviews, you looked ridiculous. At least now we know why scouts questioned Cromartie's depth perception.

**St. Louis:** The St. Louis Rams just passed on a flashy quarterback in order to get a cornerback and a defensive tackle. That was the net of Saturday's first-round Broncos-Rams trade. *The St. Louis Rams just passed on a flashy quarterback in order to get a cornerback and a defensive tackle.* Maybe if I keep repeating it, I'll believe it.

**San Francisco:** It was touching when Vernon Davis cried at the draft when he heard his name called. Sportscasters assumed Davis was overcome by joy; actually he was crying because he had been chosen by the 49ers of 2006, not the Niners of 1986. The chain of events that caused San Francisco to hand the keys to its salary cap to Alex Smith in 2005 (one touchdown throw) and then pass over California hero Matt Leinart in 2006 is one Niners' fans may be ruing, really ruing, for years to come.

**Seattle:** Beginning this year, the league will allow each team to supply its own footballs. Seattle had been hoping to supply its own officials. Coach Mike Holmgren told reporters, "I'm not saying the



"And in the fifth round, the Eagles' PR staff selects ... Jeremy Bloom, beefcake, Colorado."



Jeremy, meet Corinne, Miss September.

officials are a bunch of crooked stooges who deliberately robbed us as part of an international conspiracy run by an agency far more secret than the CIA, but it's something you might want to look in to."

**Tampa:** The Bucs also went offensive line at the top of the draft, winning the football gods' approval. Since Chris Simms left Texas, he has not been able to stand back and scan the field. All quarterbacks suddenly become more talented when they have time to scan the field. Something for Bucs' foes to think about.

**Tennessee:** Norm Chow throws out his famous 300-play playbook and installs the new Vince Young offense. In the new offense, "Spread 26 motion shallow Y-curl X-dig blast" is replaced by "Pass right."

**Washington:** The Redskins have had the fewest draft picks since 2000 and have already traded away their second and fourth choices of 2007. In Washington, "the future is now" formula of casually trading away draft choices has been in practice so long the slogan should be changed to, "The future will happen at some point."

**Estimating Future Draft Pick Value:** Last week TMQ mused on the [Dallas Chart](#), the table of equivalencies that some teams use when negotiating draft-pick swaps. But the chart only concerns the present draft, and picks are often swapped for selections in the subsequent year. Traditionally, a choice today is worth one round less than a choice in the future. For instance, on Sunday the Colts gave their sixth pick in 2007 for the Titans' seventh pick in 2006; if you want someone's second-round choice in the current year, you must offer your first-round choice in the next. This is a form of "discounting to present value," and TMQ suggests the Dallas Chart could be used to discount to present value simply by moving one column over. A team that wants to offer a third-round choice next year for a choice today would look in the fourth-round column of the table to determine the value of next year's third rounder, and so on. Of course it's impossible to know where in the round a next-year's choice might be, but using the table this way would at least generate an approximate value of a future choice being traded for a current choice.

**Case study:** In 2005, Denver traded the 25th pick of the first round for Washington's third choice in 2005, which was the 76th pick, and first choice in 2006. The Broncos then swapped Washington's first choice in 2006 to San Francisco for the Niners' second and third in 2006, which were the 37th and 68th picks. Here's the discount-to-present-value based on the chart. Denver gave up the 25th pick in 2005 (worth 720 points) for the 76th pick in 2005 (worth 210 points), the 37th pick in 2006 (worth 530 in 2006 but only 245 points in 2005 owing to discounting) and the 68th pick in 2006 (worth 250 points in 2006 but only 100 points in 2005 owing to discounting). Thus Denver traded a choice worth 720 points in 2005 for picks worth 555 points when taking into account that the Broncos received two of the three choices in the future. The economic concept of "discounting to present value" assumes the future is less valuable than the present. Take your picture now, take it again in five years, and you'll know what I mean!

**Next Week** The draft is over, so we've made it halfway through that long, cold, lonely offseason -- halfway to the resumption of the football artificial universe. Tuesday Morning Quarterback returns on a weekly basis the first Tuesday of August.

**Monday, July 31, 2006**

**Updated: August 4, 11:53 AM ET**

Offseason highs and lows

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By Gregg Easterbrook

Matt Leinart remains the sole important unsigned draft choice, and Matt, no matter how long you hold out, it's not going to change -- you were drafted only 10th. But yours truly continues to scratch his head about the slide of Matt Leinart to the 10th selection in the draft. Methinks a number of teams will someday rue, really rue, their failure to write this gentleman's name on an index card.

Houston, at the first pick, made a commitment to David Carr, and Carr has played reasonably well, without complaint, for awful teams. New Orleans, with the second choice, had lots of good reasons to select Reggie Bush. Choosing third, Tennessee believed Vince Young will be better than Leinart. Choosing fourth, Jersey/B had a draft plan that included landing a good quarterback prospect (Kellen Clemens) in the second round. So yours truly sees logic in the decisions of the first four teams to pass on Leinart.

But the next five teams -- Ye gods. Green Bay, San Francisco, Oakland, Buffalo and Detroit, all with serious quarterback issues, neglected Leinart. Sure, the Packers used a No. 1 choice on Aaron Rodgers the year prior. But that was then, this is now! For throwing ability, command of the field and swagger, Leinart is the most Brett-Favre-like prospect to enter the league in a decade. Sure the Squared Sevens used the prior year's first overall choice on Alex Smith. But that was then, this is now, why does last year's error mandate another error this year? Oakland ignored Leinart despite its underwhelming troika of Aaron Brooks, Marques Tuiasosopo and Andrew Walter at quarterback. Brooks had six years to prove himself as starter for the Saints, and in that time New Orleans rivaled the Lions as the least-feared team in the NFL. Buffalo ignored Leinart despite its underwhelming troika of Kelly Holcomb, J.P. Losman and Craig Nall at quarterback. Yes, the Bills two years ago sunk first- and second-round choices into Losman, but that was then, this is now! Buffalo has been searching for a field leader since Jim Kelly retired, and the swaggering Leinart appears the most Kelly-like prospect in a decade. Finally Detroit ignored Leinart. The Lions were reeling from not long ago using the third overall choice on a quarterback they ran out of town on a rail, Joey Harrington. But why does a previous mistake mandate another mistake?

Sure, nobody knows who will be good in the pros, and sure, Leinart's amazing 37-2 collegiate record came with a stacked team. But Green Bay, San Francisco, Oakland, Buffalo and Detroit have bad-to-awful situations at quarterback, the sport's most important position. All just passed on drafting one of the best quarterback prospects in a decade. Buffalo and Oakland passed on Leinart to draft *safeties*. Memo to the Bills and Raiders: Quarterback is more important than safety. I've got five bucks that says Leinart will be performing in Honolulu in February in the not too distant future, while at least one of the guys inexplicably taken instead of him (A.J. Hawk, Vernon Davis, Michael Huff, Donte Whitner and Ernie Sims) will be a huge disappointment. Great Caesar's Ghost!

In other football news, increasingly Roger Goodell appears likely to be the next commissioner of the National Football League. He is a fine candidate -- though I have some sympathy for a second contender, the tastefully named Gregg Levy. See below for discussion of a previous Goodell who was also a fine candidate: Roger's father Charles, one of the most admirable people ever to stand in the well of the United States Senate, and one of the heroes of my youth.

In other news, you gotta be a football hero to get along with the beautiful girls. Everyone wants to be the quarterback; every quarterback wants to throw a touchdown pass. Who recently became the man who has thrown more touchdown passes than anyone in pro football history? See below.

And in other news, I'm back and I'm bad! Well, at least I'm back. Tuesday Morning Quarterback has resumed for the 2006 season. Here, my annual kickoff column of offseason highlights and lowlights.

**Analysts Blamed High Costs:** The magazine Budget Living went out of business.

**When Did You Say the Iowa Caucuses Are?** Hillary Clinton and Rudy Giuliani, campaigning for presidential nominations, both used the phrase "cellulosic ethanol" in speeches in the same week.

**Look Honey, H&R Block Says We Get a \$32 Million Refund:** Tax preparation firm H&R Block admitted making \$32 million worth of errors in its favor on its own corporate tax returns.

**England Imitates a Cartoon:** An actual were-rabbit [terrorized gardeners](#) in the English village of Felton until a car struck and killed the ravenous two-foot-long creature.

**Offseason Football-Like Substance No. 1:** In Arena League play, the New York Dragons defeated the Utah Blaze 84-81 in the second-highest-scoring game in professional football history. The teams combined for [24 touchdowns, 778 passing yards and nine rushing yards](#). (The highest-scoring pro football game, played in 2001, saw the Dragons defeat the Carolina Cougars 99-68.) In playoff action, the Georgia Force defeated the Dragons 72-69; the Dragons had 387 yards passing and one yard rushing. In the Arena League championship, the Chicago Rush defeated the Orlando Predators 69-61 in a game that featured a 52-point second quarter. [Here are the Adrenaline Rush Dancers](#) of the Arena League champions.



America's Mayor is already on the campaign trail.

On the season, quarterback Clint Dolezel of the Dallas Desperadoes led the Arena League with 105 touchdown passes, one less than the 106 touchdown passes Peyton Manning has thrown in the last three NFL seasons combined. Andy Kelly of the Utah Blaze completed his 768th career touchdown pass, surpassing Aaron Garcia to become pro football's all-time leader in touchdown throws. (The NFL record for career touchdown passes is 420, held by Dan Marino; Warren Moon threw 435 touchdown passes in the NFL and CFL combined.) Dane Krager of the Austin Wranglers led the Arena League in rushing with 197 yards.

**Offseason Football-Like Substance No. 2:** Over in arenafootball2 - the Arena League's little brother cannot afford capital letters -- the Manchester Wolves beat the Florida Firecats 79-62 in a game that featured 21 touchdowns and nine missed PAT attempts. The Tulsa Talons beat the Bossier-Shreveport Battle Wings 72-3, as the Battle Wings kicked a short field goal in the closing minutes to deny Tulsa the shutout. [Here are the Talons' cheerleaders](#), who can't seriously be from Oklahoma -- they must fly them in.

**Offseason Football-Like Substance No. 3:** Hundreds of vibrating football enthusiasts crowded the Embassy Suites Hotel in Hunt Valley, Md., for the 12th Super Bowl of Electric Football, or SB/EF XII. The enthusiasts were not, themselves, vibrating -- in most cases. After numerous qualifying heats, Keith Chambers of Washington, D.C., bested defending champion Norbert Revels of Hamtramck, Mich., to take home the prestigious Miggle Trophy. Tuesday Morning Quarterback continues to delight in the revival of vibrating football from the 1960s. [Miggle Toys](#) of Chicago not only will sell you a 1960s-style vibrating playing field, it offers players in the home and away jerseys of every NFL team plus most major college teams, plus sideline accessories (miniature 10-yard chains, for instance), night-game equipment, miniature scowling coaches, miniature angry owners and miniature cheerleaders that are [quite scantily attired](#) by the standards of toys. You've got to love a small, independently owned American company that does nothing but make toys. Vibrating soccer is coming from Miggle this fall -- maybe it will sweep France and Italy.

Debbie Weinberg of Baltimore refereed SB/EF XII. Female officials are a cutting-edge trend in prep football, and Weinberg was one of the pioneers, certified as a Maryland high-school football official in 1984. Debbie, we'd love to have you call a game at [my kids' high school](#) in Maryland! Whether a woman ever will play in the NFL seems problematic -- football is a strength sport, and men start with a huge inherent advantage. But strength is not a factor in officiating. Good judgment, calm nerves, knowledge, reflexes and of course eyesight are the essential qualities, and there is no inherent difference between men and women in any of these categories. The two reasons female officials have not been common yet are prejudice and lack of experience on the part of female candidates. But prejudice against women in zebra stripes is slowly ending, while the girls-sports craze is now drawing many women into officiating, granting them the necessary experience. Tuesday Morning Quarterback thinks it is strictly a matter of time until female officials become common in NCAA football and then, inevitably, in the NFL.

**Stop Me Before I Score Again!** And maybe female officials will throw flags for unsportsmanlike conduct when coaches run up the score. Annually, Tuesday Morning Quarterback rails against running up the score. Recently the Connecticut Interscholastic Athletic Conference took action on



The Adreanline Rush Dancers must love all the high-scoring action of the Arena League.

this problem: Any high-school football coach whose team wins by more than 50 points will be disqualified from coaching the next game. (Coaches can appeal if the score that surpasses the 50-point margin comes on a turnover, not a called play.) "Legislated sportsmanship," protested reader Mike Cornaro of Milford, N.H., in a representative comment from TMQ readers. But a team ahead by 50 points ought to be kneeling on the ball, regardless of the time remaining; anything else is simply bad sportsmanship. Continuing to run up the score, regardless of whether your third string is on the field, shows lack of character on the part of the coach.

The Connecticut rule came in response to a coach named Jack Cochran, of New London High School, who relentlessly runs up the score. In 2005, New London High won games by margins of [90-0](#), [77-6](#), [60-0](#) and [69-14](#); in the 60-0 victory, Cochran called a timeout just before halftime, hoping to add points. New London didn't even finish undefeated -- it distinguished itself mainly by beating up overmatched opponents. Cochran told the Hartford Courant the state's new mercy rule is "protectionism of those that can't compete." So Jack, the strong should beat up the weak? That's some value system you have. At the high-school level, mercy rules are important because school-size and program-quality mismatches can lead to games that are never contested in any meaningful sense. That 90-0 win -- there was nothing glorious about it. The victor, not the vanquished, should have been embarrassed.

At the NFL level, opponents are professionals and can look after themselves: If the Seahawks run up the score on the Rams, there's little reason to care. But in all forms of scholastic competition, where learning is the ostensible purpose of the games, coaches should be teaching sportsmanship -- a valuable life lesson. Running up the score, in contrast, is bully behavior, while the desire to destroy lesser opponents is a sign of poor character. Coaches who practice bad sportsmanship and teach bully behavior aren't doing their schools or their athletes any favors. Poor character might be OK at New London High of Connecticut, but it's good to know that it is not OK with the rest of the state's high-school sports advocates.

**Another Reason Computers Can Be Trusted:** Yours truly subscribes to Norton Internet Security. When I tried to download a software update from Norton, a Norton Internet Security warning box popped up and asked, "Always block connections from this vendor?" Norton then said it "recommended" I block Norton.

**The Thieves Also Offered to Sell the Secret Formula for Vault Soft Drink for 50 Cents:** Two years ago one of TMQ's favorite offseason stories was that a federal court found the Lionel company guilty of industrial espionage -- for stealing the plans for toy trains. I envisioned a dead drop at which a code-named operative handed over a microdot containing the schematics of a new toy locomotive with realistic steam. This offseason, FBI agents in Atlanta arrested three men who claimed to be industrial spies offering to sell the secret formula for Coke. The men were asking for \$1.5 million for the formula. My favorite detail is that as part of the sting, FBI agents, pretending to be Pepsi executives, gave the men \$30,000 "packed in a Girl Scout cookie box," according to the Associated Press.



You never know what you'll find in a box of Girl Scout cookies.

**Offseason Mega-Babe News:** The 2006 Sports Illustrated swimsuit issue was believed to have been the highest-selling magazine edition in world history. A year ago yours truly noted of the SI swimsuit franchise, "Apparently the modern thong bikini covers *way* too much," since an ever-higher percentage of beach babes are shown with their tops off and hands strategically placed, or with straps untied or thumbs hooked into suit bottoms, suggesting imminent complete undress. In 2005, two of the swimsuit issue's three cover models had their bikini tops untied, while of 44 inside photos, 26 women had their tops off with hands strategically placed, or were shown with straps undone, or wore only body paint or see-through tops. This year's Sports Illustrated swimsuit number upped the ante substantially. There were eight mega-babes on the cover and none had tops on, all with hands strategically placed. Of 123 inside photos, 63 women had tops off, straps undone, wore only body paint or see-through tops, and one wore only pieces of jewelry.

Last year yours truly further noted that backpacker's bible Outside magazine, which once featured cover photos of Coleman stoves, had gone cheesecake with one cover of a bikini babe snorkeling in Hawaii and another of a sultry woman rock climbing naked. This year was the female readers' revenge, as Outside went beefcake with a cover image of the elaborately shaved chest of [surfer champ Bruce Irons](#). Meanwhile Vanity Fair ran a cover story on Teri Hatcher, for which the mag produced two different covers -- one that showed Hatcher nearly naked and another in which she was distressingly overdressed. TMQ wonders: What metric was used to decide which cover to ship to which stores?

**The National Academy of Séances Debunked the Report:** In the draft of a New York Times op-ed article, yours truly referred to a report by the National Climactic Data Center. Umm, it's the [National Climatic Data Center](#). A National Climactic Data Center would study -- well, you figure it out, and I'd certainly like to meet the interns.

**Doug, We Definitely Knew Ye:** Doug Flutie retired without having quarterbacked an NFL playoff win. Yet he played 12 years in the NFL and threw [86 touchdown passes](#), and there are many first-round, 6-foot-plus quarterbacks who wish they could say the same. Was there a conspiracy against Flutie because of his height? Yours truly thinks Flutie got plenty of chances with the Bears, Patriots, Bills and Chargers. The only time he was a consistent winner, at Buffalo, fans and management loved him -- so much for the conspiracy theory. By the time Flutie was benched at the end of the Bills' 1999 season, he had no arm strength left to throw down the middle; safeties were up on passing downs because they knew Flutie could not throw the post. Maybe if he'd landed in a different place to start his career, Flutie would have been a Super Bowl quarterback. But think of the list of first-round, 6-foot-plus quarterbacks whose careers might have gone a little better if they'd started in a different place. Most guys in that category, we can't even remember their names. Flutie's panache and his 1998 Flutie Magic year always will be remembered.

Note: The week that Flutie said he would announce, and then postponed, his decision whether to retire was also the deadline week for senior citizens to sign up for the new Medicare prescription drug benefit. Surely these two facts are not unrelated!



Which one is your favorite?

**In Praise of Charles Goodell:** Many knaves and rascallions have gone to the United States Senate to bask in its glory. Occasionally it is the man who gives glory to the Senate, and Charles Goodell, father of Roger Goodell, was such an exceptional figure.

Charles Goodell was born in 1926 in Jamestown, New York, a small town in the pastoral Southern Tier of New York: people forget that New York State is mainly rural. Beautiful and isolated from the din of the world, Jamestown represented the sort of Brigadoon where a person could still live the small-town American ideal. The most important location near Jamestown is the [Chautauqua Institution](#), a lyceum begun in 1873 as a place intellectuals and artists would retreat for the summer to give lectures and perform, sometimes for huge audiences. Chautauqua stood for the Greek dream of knowledge rather than materialism as the goal of life. That the Chautauqua Institution still exists and still draws thousands each summer to a remote rural lake *simply to learn* is a wonderful thing -- one of the wonderful things about our country that you never hear about owing to the media taboo against positive news. As a boy growing up in Buffalo in the 1950s and '60s, I was thrilled when I first visited Chautauqua; doubly thrilled last summer when Chautauqua asked me to lecture. (Please, Chautauqua, ask me back; I want to experience the porch of Wensley House, the lakefront lodge where speakers and performers stay and mingle, once again.) These points about Jamestown and its proximity to Chautauqua help position Charles Goodell in cosmic terms. He grew up in a place that represented America at its best, and the lesson was not lost on him.



Charles Goodell accomplished a lot in his short term as a senator.

Charles Goodell served in the Navy during World War II, then finished college, then graduated from Yale Law School in 1951. Rather than start a law career, he enlisted to serve in the Air Force during the Korean War. Afterward Goodell returned to Jamestown and practiced as a small-town storefront lawyer. In 1959 he ran as a Republican for Congress, and won the local seat in the House of Representatives. There he stayed until 1968, becoming known as a conscientious legislator. Among other things, Goodell joined Gerald Ford and a young congressman named Donald Rumsfeld in a bid to make the very conservative Ford the leader of congressional Republicans. In 1968, Robert F. Kennedy was murdered by a man who feared the goodness RFK embodied. New York Governor Nelson Rockefeller, a Republican, appointed Goodell to complete Kennedy's Senate term.

Charles Goodell spent only 18 months in the Senate, but used his time nobly. Shortly after arriving in the Senate he declared his opposition to the Vietnam War, becoming one of the first national figures to do so openly. Understanding that money is often at the heart of folly, Goodell introduced legislation to cut off funding for military operations in Vietnam.

Endlessly Goodell pointed out that Congress had never declared war on North Vietnam. This was one of the disgraces of American politics during the Vietnam era: not only does the Constitution vest the authority to make war solely with Congress, the rich and comfortable members of the House and Senate were willing to send young men off to die, but too politically timorous to go on record formally declaring hostilities. Whether one could be a conscientious objector to an unjust war, but support a just conflict such as World War II, was a much-discussed question of the Vietnam years; Goodell declared his support for selective objection. Goodell worked to help GIs who were jailed for speaking out against the war, and shamed the Justice Department into moving

Rev. Philip Berrigan, a war protester, from the maximum security penitentiary in which he had absurdly been confined. Much of what Goodell did enraged his party. But since he had served his country in two wars, Goodell's opinions could not be dismissed. As a New York state boy keenly following the news of the day, Charles Goodell seemed to me a beacon of honor shining into the darkness -- a manifestation of decency and personal integrity, coupled to willingness to work within the system.

In 1970, Goodell stood for reelection. Many Senate elections fail to offer a single worthwhile candidate. This race offered three who were deserving: Goodell the Republican, a well-qualified Democrat named Richard Ottinger, and James Buckley, brother of the writer William Buckley. James Buckley ran on the Conservative ticket (New York state has both Liberal and Conservative ballot lines) and was backed by factions who were furious regarding Goodell's antiwar stance. This race was the first political cause in which I got involved, a 17-year-old boy spending my spare time in the summer and fall of 1970 distributing leaflets, cold-calling voters and putting up posters. The posters were a little deceptive. Many read, CHARLES GOODELL, 44 PIECES OF MAJOR LEGISLATION IN 18 MONTHS. The number of bills a legislator drops into the hopper is largely irrelevant; in theory a senator could propose a thousand pieces of legislation a day. But the posters captured Goodell's spirit. At a time when most members of the Senate were hiding behind their office doors and refusing to face the big questions of Vietnam, Goodell spoke his conscience, and did so knowing he'd be ostracized.

Goodell and the Democratic candidate split the progressive vote, handing the 1970 election to Buckley, who himself served well, though of course to very different ends. After losing the election, Goodell wrote a history titled "Political Prisoners in America," which examined the status of the political prisoner from the 18th century forward, and argued that democracies often use national security threats in order to stifle dissent. The book warns that not even America is safe from the suppression of legitimate dissent. After the book's publication Gerald Ford, by then President Ford, named Goodell chairman of a national commission to hear appeals for clemency from Vietnam draft resisters. Later Goodell returned to the practice of law and lived quietly in Washington until he died, young, in 1987. I can remember with perfect clarity knocking on doors in 1970, a 17-year-old boy trying to explain to adults why they should vote for this man. How I wish there was a Charles Goodell in American politics today.

**Rosenhaus to TMQ: I Could Have Gotten You Free Tokens at ESPN Zone in Your Deal:**

"The quarterback, his family and a small contingent of trusted advisors this week narrowed the list of potential agents for the star quarterback to a select group of six. The unusually early process, begun in mid-May when the Quinn family interviewed 15 representatives, means that the Irish star can play his senior season with the knowledge he's already been through the toughest part of the often grueling and nettlesome recruiting routine." Thus Len Pasquarelli reported of Notre Dame's Brady Quinn. Wait a minute, it's "grueling" to choose an agent? You need a "contingent of trusted advisors" to help pick someone to work for you? This isn't the next Supreme Court nominee we're talking about. As the sports-yak universe goes 24-7-365, more attention is being paid to agents, because it provides something to talk about in the offseason. But the idea that sports agents are hugely important people is largely make-believe.



After the T.O. mess, you might want to pick another agent besides Drew Rosenhaus.

Assuming he picks any one of the couple dozen reputable NFL agents, it makes little difference whom Brady Quinn selects. Most terms of Quinn's rookie contract will be dictated by the league's "slotting" system for draft choices -- first slot gets \$X, second slot gets \$X-minus-1 and so on. There are a few hucksters who call themselves NFL agents mainly for self-promotion reasons, and have led gullible prospects astray. There are a few agents who have made spectacularly bad business judgments, such as Drew Rosenhaus advising Terrell Owens to hold his breath until he turned blue at Philadelphia. And there are a few agents, such as Leigh Steinberg, who have sterling reputations for long-term concern for their clients. But of the reputable agents, all will in any given situation negotiate approximately the same deal. The market, not the agent, determines how much a player is paid. Who's pushing the idea that sports agents are hugely important? Sports agents.

**"Conway Is Here? Tell Him to Make Mine Two Scoops With Caramel," God Said:**

James Conway Sr., who in Philadelphia in 1956 co-founded [Mister Softee](#), died at the age of 78 at his home in Ocean City, N.J.. The siren song of the approaching Mister Softee represents the melody of youth to millions of Americans. Unlike ice-cream trucks that merely sell prepackaged confections, Mister Softees make their own soft-serve on board and offer the full range of cones, sundaes and shakes. James Conway and his brother were believers in the conjunction of science and ice cream. Here, from the company Web site: "Mister Softee utilizes the latest automotive and equipment technologies to produce a complete ice cream stand on wheels. The customized truck body is made from rust-free aluminum and is powered by the new General Motors Vortec engine. The ice cream is delivered via a high efficiency Electro Freeze soft-serve machine and many of the other components are custom made specifically for Mister Softee." Vortec engine! High-efficiency Electro-Freeze! Imagine you could spend your life giving ice cream



Just looking at that truck makes you want an ice cream, doesn't it?

to children, and then die in Ocean City, an entire town devoted to the idea of strolling the boardwalk while eating salt-water taffy, cotton candy or soft-serve dipped in cherry.

**"Thanks Beyonce, That Was Great, and Oh Look, We're Out of Time for Questions About Worker Health-Care Benefits":** Beyonce performed at the Wal-Mart shareholders' meeting.

**Free to Shoes:** In the offseason, yours truly ordered a [pair of shoes](#) that included these specifications: "Injection-molded EVA foam midsole & Abzorb in both heel and forefoot for exceptional shock absorption & Fiberglass stability shank embedded into midsole & Graphite rollbar in heel, a biomechanically positioned piece of graphite in the midsole which maximizes rearfoot stability & Removable Abzorb insert, maximizes shock absorption and provides extra comfort & Tru-Trak rubber outsole." A shoe with a graphite rollbar? And if this shoe has a "stability shank," does that mean there is some danger the shoe will become unstable?

**Invisible Man Poses for Photographers:** In the offseason, some perfectly serious scientists predicted there could be [invisibility fields](#) based on materials that bend light. Light would be piped from the back of an object to the front, allowing the viewer to see what's behind the invisible person. James Bond had an invisible car in "Die Another Day": supposedly it worked by bending light. Bond drove the invisible car right up to the door of the super-villain's control center. OK, none of the guards and henchmen milling about could see the car. But why didn't they bump into it? Anyway, the invisibility device described in principle in the perfectly serious science article has a limit -- no one could see you, but you couldn't see out either.

**Ken Lay Dies In Disgrace:** Jeffrey Skilling and the late Kenneth Lay were found guilty, meaning nearly all the glorified shoplifters at the tops of Adelphia, Cendant, Enron, Qwest, Tyco and WorldCom are now either in jail for a long time or will be once their appeals are exhausted. Previously, CEOs caught stealing from stockholders lost their jobs but otherwise paid no price, plus got to keep what they stole. That's changed, and it's about time.

If men such as Lay and WorldCom's Bernard Ebbers hadn't been driven by greed, they could have lived their lives as respected figures, while still enjoying substantial riches. Greed made them want not just wealth but incredible wealth, and made them willing to break the law to get it. Psychoanalysis via television has limits, yet somehow you feel the convicted CEOs not only were persons of low character, but motivated by a desire to laugh at those from whom they were stealing. Lay, Ebbers and the rest wanted to believe they were such Big Men that no one could touch them; they could do as they pleased while mocking the little people who obey the law. Historically, most who think they can outsmart the world end up as the ones outsmarted, behind bars or otherwise laid low. Lay's death while awaiting sentencing does not exempt his memory from criticism: He will be remembered as a liar and a thief.



Enron will forever live in infamy.

All commentators have denounced the Enron executives, but many have added another claim that isn't right: that the actions of Lay, Skilling and Andrew Fastow were doubly bad because they wiped out the stock gains of Enron workers. But if Enron was a snake-oil enterprise whose valuation was inflated by securities fraud, then Enron workers' stock gains were ill-gotten, too. When the company filed for bankruptcy in December 2001, "CBS Evening News" sympathetically interviewed an

Enron secretary who declared that her \$400,000 in retirement savings, all Enron stock, had been wiped out. When Lay and Skilling were convicted in May 2006, CNN sympathetically interviewed an Enron worker who declared that his \$1 million in savings, all Enron stock, had been wiped out. But Enron was using fraud to boost its trading price, meaning workers' stock gains were obtained via deception, exactly as were executives' gains. The workers' stock gains did not come from out of the air, they came from the pockets of equity buyers -- including other average people and average people's pension funds. Of course, the Enron workers played no role in the company's lying, and so were not culpable. And Enron mistreated its workers by requiring them to invest all company-paid 401(k) contributions in the firm's stock, then limiting their ability to sell that stock. But the \$1.3 billion in Enron shares that Enron workers lost during the bankruptcy was money the workers did not deserve. The media have never gotten this point straight.

**Great Physician Dies:** In May, Lee Jong-wook died at the age of 61. He passed away a few hours after suffering a stroke, then undergoing emergency surgery that failed to remove a blood clot from his brain. Who was Lee Jong-wook? One of the world's leading physicians -- an expert on tuberculosis pathology and, on the day of his death, director general of the World Health Organization. Where did he die? At Geneva University Hospital in Switzerland, one of top health care institutions of any nation. So the head of the World Health Organization died young after receiving the best possible care. *Memento mori:* in Latin, "Remember that you too will die." The knock on your life's door could come at any hour. If it comes today, will your heart be ready?



If it happened to Lee Jong-wook, it can happen to you.

**Everyone Likes a Nice Anti-France Item:** California wines won the rematch of the Judgment of Paris. In 1976, Parisian wine snobs held a blind tasting of California and French wines. To the shock of French vintners the California wines won, and the event became known as the Judgment of Paris. (The title was a play on the mythological Judgment of Paris, at which the mortal man Paris was asked to judge which of three goddesses, Aphrodite, Athena or Hera, was most beautiful; needless to say Paris was screwed no matter how he answered.) After the 1976 event, the Old World wine establishment snickered that the reason for the outcome was the tasting featured young wines; American wines won't age, they said. Thirty years later in May 2006, a second Judgment of Paris was held, this time with the entrants confined to wines that already had been bottled by 1976. California trounced France again, aged Golden State wines impressing tasters more in blind tasting than aged French wines.

A 1971 Ridge Monte Bello cabernet sauvignon from the Santa Cruz mountains came in first. Within hours of the announcement, so far as I could determine from the Froogle shopping service, every available bottle of 1971 Ridge Monte Bello in the world had been sold, though a few bottles of the 1975 are still being [offered at \\$160 each](#). On NPR, a South African vintner declared that the reason California keeps trouncing France is that Californian winemakers care about their customers while French winemakers hold their customers in contempt. That sounds right. Now how about a Judgment of Johannesburg, where South African and Australian wines get to take on the French? I think we know who'd win.



Tough call, huh Paris?

### **Robots, Cyborgs, Members of Congress -- What's the**

**Difference?** To hype its special "Countdown to Doomsday," Sci-Fi Channel sponsored a Washington symposium on Capitol Hill. As Libby Copeland reported in the Washington Post, at the symposium Sci-Fi Channel types warned that robots could take over the Earth, and showed video of giant marching machines enslaving humans on

"Battlestar Galactica." Aside from confusing fiction with reality, which is a big enough problem in Washington as is, the creatures on "Battlestar Galactica" are not robots! They are cyborgs, living things containing metal. Robots are mere machines. If you're going to warn members of Congress about hypothetical future threats, at least get your hypothetical future threats right. (The running gag in the "Terminator" movies is that whenever someone refers to Arnold Schwarzenegger as a robot, he dryly corrects, "Cybernetic organism.") Here is yours truly's 2003 Wired magazine piece on [possible Doomsday threats](#), in which I conclude that "a careless Brookhaven postdoc chopsticking Chinese takeout" is a lot more likely to destroy the Earth than robots.

### **A \$54,000 Per Night Hotel Room Costs the Same as the U.S. Median Family Income for a**

**Year:** Ian O'Connor of USA Today recently praised golfer Phil Mickelson as generous to the poor, writing, "[Mickelson] pulls over to the curb, with no cameras or notebooks in sight, and hands hundred-dollar bills to homeless men." Hmm -- if no one with a camera or notebook was present, how does USA Today know this happened? For its part the Wall Street Journal recently reported Mickelson paid \$3.4 million for a nine-week penthouse timeshare at [Saint Andrews Grand](#) in Scotland, an ultra-lux condo overlooking the Old Course at Saint Andrews, frequent site of the British Open. The price works out to \$54,000 per night, making this perhaps the most expensive hotel room in human history. Phil Mickelson -- do you really believe that in a world where the impoverished of Africa die for want of a dollar a day, you are justified in spending \$54,000 *per night* to make yourself feel important?

**Lesson: Don't Be Strongest:** The strongest player at this year's NFL combine, Mike Kudla of Ohio State, who did 45 reps of 225 pounds, wasn't drafted. In 1999, Justin Ernest, a player from Eastern Kentucky, had the best combine strength performance ever, 51 reps of 225, and was not drafted. At the 2000 combine, Leif Larsen of UTEP did 45 reps of 225; he and Kudla are tied for second-strongest-ever. Larsen was drafted but never started a game and is now OOF, Out of Football.

**Burger Watch:** This winter the tastefully named Steve Easterbrook, head of McDonald's United Kingdom, unveiled the Bigger Big Mac, a supersized Big Mac now being sold in the British Isles and Germany. Easterbrook also said McDonald's U.K.'s four-year drive to promote salads, fruit and yogurt has failed, garnering less than 10 percent of sales, and that the company would go back to basics by promoting cheeseburgers and Quarter Pounders. Easterbrook told the Times of London,

"It's time to be proud, to go out and say, 'We're a good burger company.'" But shouldn't the Quarter Pounder be marketed in Europe as the 0.113398093 Kilogramer? The D/QPC would be a 0.226796185 Kilogramer avec Fromage. Sandwich note: The chicken tikka toasted deli sandwich sold by McDonald's outlets in England is better than anything sold in any American McDonald's.

**Burger Watch No. 2:** Burger King began offering Stackers, cheeseburgers with no lettuce, tomato or even pickles -- just beef, cheese, bacon and mayo-based sauce. "A mountain of beef and cheese" is the company's Stackers tag line. Burger King claims that a [Stackers Triple](#) with three beef patties, six slices of bacon and three slices of cheese has 800 calories, or a third of an adult's daily recommended caloric intake in a single sandwich, the cola and fries being extra. TMQ finds this calculation hard to believe, since Burger King asserts that six slices of bacon contains just 80 calories. Consumer groups, please test the Stackers for actual calorie content.

**Burger Watch No. 3:** "The potential for drive-through fast food in China is huge," the Wall Street Journal quoted a McDonald's executive as saying. "We see the future of China based on cars, commuting and houses spreading out." The conspiracy theory is that Beijing is buying U.S. Treasury bills to undermine our society. Ha! We'll undermine theirs a lot faster with fast food and traffic gridlock.

**Car Watch:** Anna Kournikova, Eve Longoria, Lindsey Lohan, Stacy Keibler, Jenna Elfman and Electra were among celebrity women who posed with new cars in revealing evening gowns at [General Motors' annual auto fashion event](#) in Los Angeles. (The women were in the revealing gowns, not the cars.) Jamie Foxx and Derek Luke were the only men to model, and they were fully clothed. Studies suggest that almost half of all new-car purchase decisions are now made by women. Is this yet another area where Detroit is out of touch?

**Low Point of My Offseason:** At a trendy sandwich place in California, I actually said, "I'll have that on the eight-grain ciabatta asiago ficelle."

**High Point of My Offseason:** A ride in the cab of one of these, [General Electric's Evolution](#), the world's most advanced diesel-electric locomotive. The locomotives represent a breakthrough in fuel efficiency and pollution reduction, the later important because trains traditionally have been exempt from environmental controls. The 4,400-horsepower Evolution uses five percent less fuel than other locomotives of the same power -- which means a lot since a typical locomotive burns 1,000 gallons of diesel per day -- and emits 40 percent less pollution. General Electric is at work on a [hybrid locomotive](#) that would achieve further reduction in emissions and fuel use. My notes:

- The Evolution cab has cupholders.
- This enormous 208-ton product of heavy manufacturing is not built in Mexico or Malaysia but Erie, Pa.
- The Evolution is selling like crazy in part because the George W. Bush administration imposed the first national emissions standards on locomotives; also on construction equipment, off-road vehicles, marine engines and other previously unregulated sources of diesel exhaust. Bush further required that diesel fuel itself be "reformulated" to reduce inherent pollution content. Did you know that President Bush ordered a major strengthening of clean-air law? Of course you didn't, since the mainstream media refuse to report this.
- Public-health studies have linked diesel exhaust to asthma. Given that a major federal initiative is now underway to reduce diesel emissions, future asthma rates should decline.
- China's national railroad has ordered 300 Evolutions, though they cost more than regular locomotives. This is an indicator China's government wants progress against air pollution.

- The Erie plant also built the special locomotives for the new [Qinghai-Tibet Railroad](#), which has tracks at nearly 16,000 feet, making it the highest rail line in the world. The locomotives require extra equipment to operate in extreme cold and thin air, while the trains' passenger compartments have oxygen lines travelers wear at high altitude.
- On a recent visit to General Electric headquarters in Fairfield, Conn., yours truly found in the men's room a five-step set of instructions for washing one's hands. It was not a joke.
- General Electric has begun marketing to NFL clubs a package that includes stadium lighting and appliances, stadium security, stadium environmental services (wastewater treatment), team travel, team apparel and sports medicine. Please General Electric -- add play-calling services to this package!

**High Point of My Offseason No. 2:** Yours truly visited ESPN headquarters in Bristol, Conn., and stayed at the Bristol Clarion Hotel, which Clarion says is "ideally located off Interstate 84." Yes, it's nothing but glamour in the ESPN world. According to its Web site, the Clarion's features include "valet cleaning service." In case your valet is dirty? Visible from the Clarion is a strange structure that looks like a set for filming a Philip José Farmer "Riverworld" story -- a giant, narrow tower, perhaps 30 stories high, with no windows and no clear function. It turns out to be a test facility for the Otis Elevator company.



You haven't really visited Bristol unless you spent a night in the famed Clarion.

**Offseason Mega-Babe News No. 2:** Erica Chevillar, a history teacher at West Boca Raton High School in Florida, is a member of something called the U.S.A. National Bikini Team. She models under the name Erica Lee, and for thong-based reasons, we can [link to her pictures](#) but not show them. According to the Palm Beach Post, parents complained when they heard about Chevillar's swimsuit modeling. You'd think they would have cheered, as her presence surely insured boys' attendance and attentiveness in class.

Roxanne Roberts of the Washington Post reports that at Donald Trump's Miss USA pageant in Baltimore, the crowd booed when Miss Ohio finished fourth. Miss Ohio was a favorite owing to her [Jennifer-Lopez-esque no-front evening gown](#). Roberts further reports that the pro-Ravens crowd booed judge Hines Ward. There's a lot of booing at beauty pageants? Here's the swimsuit photo of the winner, [Miss Kentucky, Tara Conner](#), whose hobbies include rappelling. Check out [Miss Arizona, Brenna Sakas](#), whose degree is in "human communication." What other kind of communication is there? Finally, Roberts reports that she asked Baltimore Mayor Martin O'Malley, a candidate for governor of Maryland and known to have national aspirations, which contestant he liked. O'Malley said he liked Miss Ohio. Roberts quipped, "Playing to the national audience already!"



We couldn't resist going with the swimsuit shot. Can you blame us?

**Pageants note::** There is now a [Miss Galaxy](#). But, are other planets represented?

**Beefcake note::** Asked to name the hottest man in America, seven percent of Page 2 readers voted for Sam Cassell.

**Wacky Food of the Year:** *Esquire* magazine's 2005 [Restaurant of the Year](#), The Modern in New York City, offers roasted wild-boar chop with rutabaga *choucroute*, red currants and a potato terrine. The Modern also offers potato escargot gâteau -- sweetened cake of potato and snail.

**Added Fees Are to Revenue As ... :** The College Board, which markets the SAT, announced that thousands of high school students received the wrong scores owing to what it called "technical problems in the scoring process" Technical problems in the scoring process -- sounds like the Cleveland Browns. [Check this announcement](#) from the College Board about its problems, cryptically headlined, "ADDITIONAL DETAIL ABOUT OCTOBER 2005 SAT SCORES." That bland, passive wording certainly would not score well on the new writing SAT. Wrong scores, the College Board explains, were "caused by humidity in combination with the light or incomplete marking of answer sheets." Huh -- "humidity in combination with the light?" That isn't even grammatical. It is not reassuring to know that the agency that sets itself up in judgment of the intellects of others issues incomprehensible statements that have not been copy-edited.

After botching the scores on more than 4,000 SATs, the College Board discretely informed parents that for an extra \$100, they could [purchase "score verification"](#). This product, sold by the College Board, is an insurance policy against blunders by the College Board. Expect upper-class and upper-middle parents to pay the extra \$100, generating yet another way in which the SAT favors the well-off. TMQ does not object to testing, but does object that parents' income confers a substantial advantage in the college-entrance arms race, especially via the private coaching that the rich can afford and the poor cannot. Anyway, now as well-off parents pay an extra \$100, the College Board will profit from its own screw-up. Which makes you wonder, can we even be sure it was a screw-up?

**New question for the fall 2006 SAT:**

Q. The College Board is to competent as:

- A. Anthracite is to popcorn
- B. Snowplow is to linoleum

- C. Trigonometry is to reliquary
- D. Placard is to iridescent

**Kennewick Man Insisted on Talking Off the Record:** Time Magazine ran a cover story headlined: EXCLUSIVE! THE UNTOLD STORY OF THE FIRST NORTH AMERICANS. The cover showed an artist's conception, based on a controversial set of human fossils found near the Columbia River, identified as "9,400-year-old Kennewick Man." Wait a minute, the magazine got an *exclusive* with someone who died 9,400 years ago?

**TMQ Boss Key in the Works:** CBS Sportsline included a boss key, which turned the screen into a spreadsheet, in its live Web broadcasts of the NCAA men's tournament.

Obviously this was done on the expectation that millions of people would watch March Madness on their screens at the office. But CBS is, itself, part of the huge multinational, Viacom. Was Viacom actually attempting to sabotage its competitors by decreasing their worker productivity during the tournament?

**Arial Got the News Via Courier:** As the typeface for its new Web site design, the New York Times chose Georgia -- abandoning the world's best-known typeface, Times New Roman. OK, Times New Roman originally was named for the Times of London. But still!

**So This Priest, This Rabbi and Three Sitcom Writers Go Into a Bar ... :** New York's Village Voice retracted an article when its author admitted he had [fabricated an account](#) of three sitcom writers meeting in a bar to try to pick up women. He had to fabricate this? It's impossible to *stop* sitcom writers from meeting in bars to try to pick up women.

**Further Proof of the Decline of Western Civilization:** More than 200 scouts, NFL reps, agents and journalists attended the USC pro day at which Reggie Bush jogged around in shorts. According to the Associated Press, more than 1,000 *spectators* attended Bush's pro day.

**Further Proof of the Decline of Western Civilization No. 2:** Dozens of journalists lined the steps of the Supreme Court building as former Playmate of the Year Anna Nicole Smith arrived to hear arguments on her probate claim. In a totally straightforward front-page article with vital public-policy implications, the Washington Post somberly reported Smith "was fully clothed" when she sat in the Court chambers.

**I'd Like to Someday Be the Owner of the First House on the Moon, There Would Be No Neighbors and No Population Boom ... :** The Wall Street Journal reported that St. Thomas, St. Croix and Barbados are "built out" -- every meter of beachfront property in use for hotels, resorts and luxu vacation homes. Builders are now assailing less-known Caribbean islands. About \$7 million buys you a [four-bedroom villa at the Viceroy](#), under development on unknown Anguilla. It looks serene. How long until there are noisy frat-boy parties next door?

**But What Have You Done for Us Lately?:** Guard Larry Allen, who has been to 10 Pro Bowls as a Cowboy and who started every game in 2005 for Dallas, was waived so that Dallas could avoid paying him a due bonus. In his typically charming way, 'Boys coach Bill Parcells did not make the traditional announcement praising a departed veteran. Allen was the last player on the Cowboys roster to have appeared in any of its 1990s Super Bowl wins. Started in the franchise's last Super Bowl victory? Played in 10 Pro Bowls? Hit the road!

**Honey, the Garage Decorator Is Here:** Last January yours truly did an item about garage refrigerators -- expensive new appliances that have heaters to warm the compressors that refrigerators use to make cold air, so the outdoor fridge will continue to consume energy to make cold air when normal refrigerators would shut down because, um, it's cold out. I further noted that

manufacturers are now offering other fancy appurtenances for garages and asked, "How long until home buyers want a garage with faux-granite countertops?" The answer -- not long! Six weeks after my item, the New York Times ran a Page 1 story about how affluent suburbanites are spending \$10,000 or more to tart up their garages, with "garage organizing one of the fastest growing segments of the home improvement market." Buyers want spotless floors, stainless steel appliances, fancy countertops and special cabinets.

While the flashy garage enters the cycle of consumption, kitchens continue to rival boats as America's leading money pits. Consider a delightful [article in the winter New Atlantis](#), an important journal about the interaction of society and technology. In "Are We Worthy of Our Kitchens," Christine Rosen noted studies showing that the more Americans invest to acquire impressive renovated kitchens, the less time they actually spend in the kitchen cooking food. Fancy kitchens have become a status symbol that you boast about while eating out. The trendy Aga oven (\$12,000 plus installation and floor strengthening) is maddeningly difficult to use for actual cooking, Rosen writes. Status-conferring Viking ovens cost thousands and yet don't seem to produce food as well as a regular Sears oven. And don't get me started on the high-status, low-practicality Sub-Zero refrigerator, which costs \$6,000 and which Consumer Reports recently rated as significantly less reliable than an \$800 Whirlpool.

American households with incomes of \$70,000 and above now spend half their food budgets on meals purchased away from the home, according to Department of Labor statistics. Yet it's the very same group that is renovating kitchens with granite countertops, espresso makers and shiny doodads intended to create an illusion of high-end domesticity. As David Brooks noted in his seminal 2000 book on Baby Boomer pretensions, "Bobos in Paradise," today's tens of millions of well-off Americans might feel guilty about obvious displays of wealth, but think it egalitarian "to spend on parts of the house that would previously have been used by the servants."

**Top Gun Fighter Wags Wings for Last Time:** Each year TMQ tips his hat to whatever famous aircraft hears its final hurrah. The Navy's F-14 Tomcat variable-geometry fighter, futuristic when it debuted in 1973, was retired from active service in March. [Here, the final two F-14 squadrons, the VF-31 Tomcatters and the VF-213 Blacklions, soar in formation](#) above the Theodore Roosevelt before heading toward Oceana Naval Air Station in Virginia as the Roosevelt ends a tour. (Often an aircraft carrier's complement flies back to land as soon as the ship draws within range of home port.) The F-14 was the star of the 1986 flick "Top Gun" -- none of the actors in that movie were as expressive as the airplane -- and first taxied onto the flight-line 33 years ago. To put that period of service into perspective, 33 years is the time that passed between the Sopwith Camel, the pattering one-man biplane of World War I, and the [B-47 Stratojet](#), first jet bomber of the Cold War. But then the B-52s that continue to fly for the Air Force came off the assembly line in 1962, 44 years ago, and the plan is to operate them indefinitely. For years, Air Force leadership has been complaining that B-52s are older than the pilots who fly them; soon, they will be twice as old as the pilots who fly them. You would not drive a car that was twice as old as you, yet your nation routinely asks its air personnel to fly in aircraft built decades before they were born.



The word Tomcat has taken on an entirely different meaning, unfortunately.

Speaking of Cold War bombers, one fascinating plane of that era has been forgotten: the [10-engine B-36](#). This gigantic plane was designed to ferry a single nuclear warhead from the United States to the former Soviet Union -- the early nuclear bombs were large and heavy. The first B-36 was completed in 1951. Some 385 B-36s were built, versus a total of 188 bombers in the entire Air Force today. By 1959, all B-36s except museum models had been decommissioned and scrapped. Nearly 400 huge aircraft built, flown and scrapped in less than a decade, at a time the defense budget was a fraction of today's! Nothing the United States has ever built and forgotten tops the [B-36D version of the bomber](#). This lumbering aircraft carried an entire F-84 jet fighter in its bomb bay. The plan was that above the Soviet Union, the B-36D would release the fighter, which would protect the bomber from Soviet interceptors; then the fighter would fly back to mid-air retrieval in a net deployed by the bomber; the fighter pilot would climb back into the B-36D. Chalk up the B-36D as yet another piece of Cold War hardware we can all be glad was never used.



Imagine seeing a B-36 sailing across the sky.

What's an item about the B-36D doing in this column? Remember, this is Tuesday Morning Quarterback. I don't have to have a reason.

**You Cannot Answer "None of the Above":** In the offseason, yours truly was called both a "big-deal writer" and a "*uomo universale*" by the Washington Post. Now, which of these statements is true?

**Reader Animadversion:** Got a complaint or a deeply held grievance? Write me at [TMQ\\_ESPN@yahoo.com](mailto:TMQ_ESPN@yahoo.com). Include your real name and the name of your hometown, and I might quote you by name unless you instruct me otherwise. Question for readers: Andy Kelly rules professional football. But if high school, college and the pros are taken into account, who has thrown the most touchdown passes?

**Next Week:** Clear the decks, prepare to dive -- Tuesday Morning Quarterback defends Dan Snyder! (Note: In World War II submarine movies, it always seems to me the diving horn is sounding, "Arugula! Arugula!")

**Monday, August 7, 2006**  
**Updated: August 21, 5:29 PM ET**  
How Snyder helped save the NFL

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By Gregg Easterbrook

When this column kicked off in 2000, Daniel Snyder was dubbed Owner/Menace to Western Civilization Dan Snyder. Many felt that understated the case. Later the gentleman was rechristened Lord Voldemort, after the sinister villain in the endless Harry Potter saga. Today TMQ assigns the Redskins' owner a newcognomen -- Chainsaw Dan, which is explained below. But otherwise I come to praise Snyder, not pummel him. This might be hard to believe, and is certainly hard to write: Dan Snyder should now be admired by anyone who loves professional football. Snyder helped rescue the league in 2006, and did so by putting his own ego and financial concerns aside.

Often what is missed about a news event is what *didn't* happen. What didn't happen during the March 2006 double showdown over the NFL's labor agreement and internal revenue-sharing deal is that Dan Snyder did not insist on the best possible outcome for the Washington Redskins. Instead he placed the interests of the sport first. Chainsaw Dan, Tuesday Morning Quarterback's hat is off to you.

The owners' side of the double showdown pitted some of the small-market owners, such as James Irsay of Indianapolis and Ralph Wilson of Buffalo, against big-city owners such as Snyder, Pat Bowlen of Denver, Jerry Jones of Dallas and Robert McNair of Houston. Big-city teams have more revenue -- from \$50 million to \$100 million more annually -- owing to larger local markets and a richer customer base for club seats and luxury-box sales. The big-city teams also tend to have aggressive, marketing-driven owners. (Snyder's career background is in corporate marketing; Wilson started in insurance.) National television revenue already is split 32 ways, and this is one of the best things about the NFL. But the small-city owners wanted the big boys to commit to increased sharing of locally-generated revenue.

Higher-net-worth, aggressive owners like Snyder were miffed at the idea that they should work like crazy for local income, then simply hand part over to small-city owners. And though any Washington team obviously has more marketing potential than any Green Bay or Jacksonville team, big-city owners also face higher costs, a fact the small-city faction likes to brush aside. In the last round of stadium-raising, the big-city teams have paid much or most of the cost themselves, while small-city teams tend to get their facilities wrapped in ribbons. Each year Snyder, Robert Kraft of New England and other big-city owners must meet the debt service on loans for construction of their fields, while the Colts' gleaming new stadium is coming as a gift from Indiana taxpayers. So though, during the negotiations, the big-city owners were portrayed in the press as ravenous and the small-city owners as aw-shucks Jimmy Stewarts, there were some points on the big boys' side.

At any rate Snyder, Jones, McNair and the rest gave in to the small-city owners, and merely argued the details of the sharing formula. This was statesmanlike. Yes, it's surprising to use the words



What's this, praise for Daniel Snyder in TMQ? Unreal!

"statesmanlike" and "Dan Snyder" in the same sentence, but there it is. Snyder and other big-boy owners might have demanded that they keep all local revenue -- there's no law of nature that says NFL owners must share. The small-city owners had the weaker hand, yet the guys with the stronger hand voluntarily gave up some of their cards. This preserved the integrity of the game. Unlike Major League baseball, where the monied teams stomp on the small-market clubs, the NFL will remain a sport where Cincinnati is the competitive equal of New York City. (Which, for NFL purposes, is located in New Jersey.) It's said that behind the scenes, other big-money owners took their cues from Snyder: If he was willing to compromise, they would too. Once again, Chainsaw Dan, TMZ's hat is off to you.

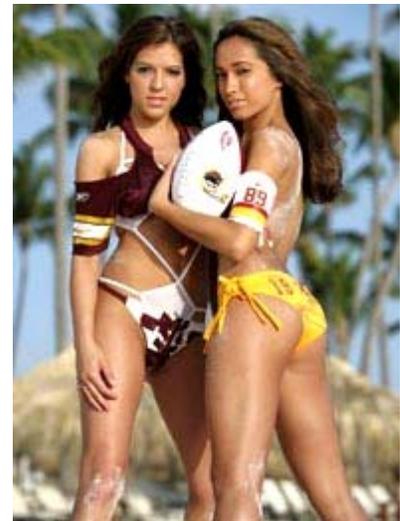
Now to explain the new cognomen. Snyder owns a remarkably gigantic ultra-luxe mansion along the Potomac River. Lovely greenhouse-gas-absorbing trees used to block Snyder's view of the storied Potomac waters. Then some 130 trees between the home and the river were felled, and not by Paul Bunyan. What has followed has been a running melodrama involving Snyder, the National Park Service, the local media and Rep. Chris Van Hollen, the congressman from Snyder's district. (The Park Service has jurisdiction because Snyder's property abuts the [Chesapeake & Ohio Canal National Historical Park](#).) First the Park Service claimed to know nothing about the missing trees; then it said Snyder had permission to cut them; then it said an appraiser would charge Snyder for the property-value increase caused by the river view; most recently, the line has become that "[a high-ranking National Park Service official improperly helped](#)" Snyder secure the permission. Knowing Snyder has popularity problems, Rep. Van Hollen has hit hard on the [Case of the Missing Foliage](#). What's hysterical about all this is that Chainsaw Dan won't simply come out and say he cut the trees down because he wanted to see the river. Snyder maintains his real goal was -- biodiversity protection! He says the trees were not native to the Potomac basin, and he has replanted seedlings of native species. Which will not, one expects, grow enough to block the view until Snyder enters his golden years. Here's a haiku:

*At this team they love  
Billy Kilmer, but not Joyce:  
Chainsaw Dan's Redskins.*

**Swimsuit Calendar of the Week:** Because Dan Snyder is as marketing-oriented as a human being can be, he has brought the team's cheer-babe unit to the cutting edge. The Redskins Cheerleaders now number among the league elite, every bit the equal of the Broncos, Dolphins and Eagles cheerleaders for beauty, dance-routine complexity and state of undress. (Note the Dallas Cowboys cheerleaders don't even make the list anymore.) [Here is the new Redskins swimsuit calendar](#), which is hot to the touch. In keeping with the Eagles' cheerleaders' theory that the modern thong bikini conceals *way* too much, the Redskins' cover cheerleader is topless. [Here are the Redskins Cheerleaders in their warm-weather game-day outfits](#), which constitute a strong argument for warm weather.

**What Woodrow Wilson and Ralph Wilson Have in Common:**

Ralph Wilson was one of two owners to vote against the new NFL-union deal, saying he voted no because he did not understand what he was voting on. For this comment Wilson was derided by sportswriters, but the Bills' owner was just being honest. Fine points of the deal changed so many



Prediction: This calendar will sell pretty well.

times as the deadline loomed that none of the owners knew for sure what they were voting on. The last bargaining session was like the day before an adjournment of Congress; after weeks of foot-dragging, at midnight the final provisions of a bill are scrawled out in haste and representatives and senators are expected to say yea or nay without a chance to read the language they are voting on. Of the beginning of the deadline meeting, NFL.com reported: "Most of the first three hours was spent simply listening to commissioner Paul Tagliabue go through details of the union's proposal." It took Woodrow Wilson only 20 minutes to present the Fourteen Points at Versailles!

Wilson and other small-city owners were worried that the new revenue-sharing agreement won't work as promised. When the salary cap first went into effect in 1994, the NFL started a system called SRS that was intended to transfer moderate amounts from rich teams to lesser teams. The theory was that because the salary cap would cause all teams to spend approximately the same on players, small-city teams with lower income would have to use a higher share of their revenues on players than would big-city teams. Supposedly the SRS system would transfer enough money to small-city teams that all NFL clubs would spend roughly the same share of their revenue on players. To make a long story short, it didn't work out that way. Wilson's worry was that the revenue-sharing plan of 2006 would sound good but later quietly be dialed down.

There's still a danger that could happen, as the March deal did not finalize revenue-sharing details. It's expected the new formula will distribute about \$150 million from rich clubs to small-city clubs in the first year. But that's still not ironed out: currently, the NFL has the high-status consulting firm [McKinsey & Company](#) working on the formula. The Bengals, Bills, Colts, Jaguars and Packers might or might not prove happy with whatever terms McKinsey recommends. But it all comes back to "compared to what?" The wealthy teams might have given nothing to the small-city teams; instead small-city teams get higher revenues and stay competitive. Think of all the things that might have gone wrong for the small cities if the mega-owners faction hadn't unexpectedly turned statesmanlike.

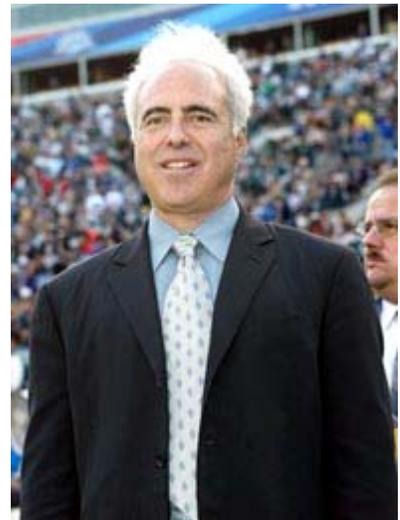
**More Uncharacteristic Praise No. 1:** This column has never had anything against departing commissioner Paul Tagliabue, but hasn't been nuts about him, either. Tagliabue is a corporate lawyer by training, hired by the NFL from the extremely pinstriped corporate litigation firm of [Covington & Burling](#). As commissioner, Tagliabue acted like a corporate lawyer -- cautious, showing no personality, careful never to displease or challenge his clients, namely the owners. But at the end, Tags turned in a tremendous performance. Last week's column noted, "Money is often at the heart of folly." There is so much money in the NFL's new network deals that it would have been insane for the league and the union to fail to reach a handshake, jeopardizing the golden goose. But disaster could have happened. Some owners wanted to screw the union, or screw other owners. Some factions in the union leadership, especially its legal department, wanted talks to fail so they could boast about screwing the league. Some owners wanted to use the confusion to grab more of the pie than other owners. Some celebrity players wanted talks to fail, creating an uncapped year, because they would be paid more, though average players would be screwed. Some owners were furious that the union was insisting on a role in revenue-sharing among owners, which seemed like none of the players' business. At one point the whole thing nearly collapsed over whether players would get 59.2 percent or 59.8 percent of revenues. There was tremendous potential for fiasco -- and Tagliabue kept that from happening.

A major worry going into the showdown bargaining was that the owners would bicker amongst themselves, and Tags would prove too timid to take a position. Instead the commissioner took a strong leadership stance and forced 32 oversized egos to face the reality that if they didn't complete a deal, the world would view them as 32 fools. (Actually 31 fools, since the Packers are publicly

owned.) By the standards of how corporate lawyers operate, Tagliabue's behavior in the final month of bargaining was bold. Since this column is handing out compliments, let's hand one to Tags -- he really came through for professional football. First ballot Hall of Fame, please.

Though Tagliabue's performance was impressive at the last, there is no need to exaggerate his legacy. Many credited him with the fact that 26 NFL stadiums have been built or renovated since he took over in 1989. But this is a reflection of rising national prosperity; basketball and baseball also have seen a significant building boom in the same period. News outlets exaggerated Tagliabue's legacy by not converting money comparisons into today's dollars. One story said NFL television revenues were \$468 million a year when Tags arrived and \$3.7 billion in 2006, while average player salaries were \$343,000 when he arrived and now will be \$1.6 million. A common fault of journalism is making money comparisons seem more dramatic by not adjusting for inflation. Stated in today's dollars, when Tagliabue arrived the average player income was \$550,000 a year and the NFL television contracts paid \$750 million annually. The numbers still went up sharply under Tagliabue, just not as much as it might seem before conversion to 2006 dollars. (See additional numbers from the new agreement below.)

**More Uncharacteristic Praise No. 2:** That the league and the union did not mutually self-destruct was the NFL's best news of the past year. The second best news was that owner Jeff Lurie of the Eagles made Terrell Owens walk the plank. This harmed Philadelphia's season -- perhaps the Eagles could have reached the playoffs had it not been for the Owens meltdown. But throwing Owens off the team was clearly in the league's long-term interest. So here again we have a very wealthy man, just the sort normally blasted in the press for selfishness, setting aside his own interests for the larger interest of the sport.



Jeffery Lurie has admitted he made a mistake with T.O.

The me-first virus is methodically destroying the NBA, and if it spreads in the NFL, could destroy pro football, too. In the NBA, half the star players don't give a flying fig about the team -- they care only about stats and drawing attention to themselves. The NFL isn't like that, which is why the quality of competition is so good. Owens was a test case: If he'd gotten away with caring only about himself, the me-first virus might have entered the NFL bloodstream. Instead Owens was spectacularly stopped, and hard upon the spectacular stop of Maurice Claret, who contended the entire NFL success system should be torn up to benefit him personally. That Owens lost his bid to place himself above the team was tremendous, and Lurie of the Eagles gets the credit.

**Shoot the Term "Shooter":** George Orwell was oh so right that we must call things what they are in order to think clearly. Recently this space has complained about calling prisoners "detainees" and illegal immigrants "undocumented arrivals." Murder is another area where the media, especially, seem unable to call things what they are. When some fiend harms multiple people, newscasters call this a "shooting spree." A spree is a gay, carefree outing! In July a sick man killed one person and injured five at the Jewish Federation of Greater Seattle; over and over again newscasters called his actions a "spree." It was a relief to hear Paula Zahn of CNN call the crime what it was, "a murder rampage." Some newscasters won't even use the word "murder" in connection with events like the one in Seattle. They saying "killing" -- "murder" is too judgmental. But killing is sometimes justified; murder never is. When the innocent are killed, the correct term is murder.

Equally vexing is constant media and cultural use of the word "shooter" for someone who commits murder using a firearm. Press reports regularly refer to the person holding the gun during a murder as "the shooter," which almost sounds like some kind of skilled trade. The person holding the gun during a murder is "the murderer." This came to a head in Arizona this summer when a pair of fiends prowling Phoenix was dubbed the Serial Shooter, and so referred to even by Phoenix police. A murderer isn't a "shooter," he's a murderer. Shooter is a neutral term -- there are perfectly respectable forms of shooting. (Hunting, marksmanship competitions, etc.) Please, media, stop calling murderers "shooters."

**Fanned Butts of the Rich and Famous:** [The \\$180,375 Mercedes CL65](#) has "active ventilated front seats with eight internal fans." But you still have to push a button to turn on the eight internal fans. That's really inconvenient. When will Mercedes offer automatic active ventilated front seats? Amazingly, \$180,375 gets you only a single CD in-dash -- the six-CD changer, now standard in-dash in most everyday sedans, is located in the trunk. And there's an asterisk on that \$180,375 price, noting a \$775 transportation fee. So this car costs \$180,375 plus \$775. Let's hope that \$775 isn't a deal-breaker.

**Explanation: Impossible:** We shouldn't ask for an explanation of why, in the climax of "Mission Impossible III," the supervillain, previously shown commanding a heavily armed private militia and protected by bodyguards even when at the Vatican, nevertheless travels nearly alone to Shanghai to confront Tom Cruise, world's greatest secret agent. My 11-year-old, Spenser, whispered, "Dad, if he's so powerful, how come he's creating a chance for Tom Cruise to get him?" How come, indeed. Nor should we ask why considerable gunfire during the lengthy Shanghai sequence never results in anyone calling the police. Nor should we ask about the scene in which Cruise sprints across rooftops of Chinese houses in the old city area of Shanghai. Rooftops of traditional Chinese homes won't support anyone's weight; he would have crashed through the first one.

Certainly we shouldn't ask for an explanation of the bridge battle. Cruise captures the supervillain at the Vatican, then immediately leaves with him in a jet bound for [Naval Air Station Oceana](#) in Virginia. At Oceana, the supervillain is put into a prisoner transfer truck which heads north, surrounded by SUVs full of agents. The destination? The headquarters of Cruise's employer: An Agency Far, Far More Secret Than the CIA. As the convoy is crossing the bridge portion of the [Chesapeake Bay Bridge-Tunnel](#), the supervillain's private army attacks with helicopter-borne commandos and a drone that launches air-to-ground missiles. The attacking mercenaries, we are told, came from Germany. How did they leave Germany after Cruise's plane left Italy, yet arrive in Virginia many hours sooner -- time enough to get into position, plus uncrate their helicopters?



Pretty sad we'll never be able to look at Tom Cruise the same way again.

Nor should we ask if you really can drive a Lamborghini directly to the front door of the Vatican and *find a parking space there*. This scene is warranted because it gives Maggie Q an excuse to wear a three-ounces-of-fabric evening gown.

Fans of the old "Mission Impossible" television series wistfully recall it was based on elaborate ruses in which bad guys were tricked into doing something; violence was rare and the viewers'

challenge was to figure out who was tricking whom at what point. The three "M.I." films have been little more than random strings of explosions, screaming and killing. Contemporary movies make much of their returns in the overseas market, where explosions, screaming and killing require no translation. "Gotta dumb it down for the overseas market" has become an all-weather excuse for Hollywood to produce dreck. Yet in its prime weeks, the box-office competition of "M.I. III" was "Ice Age II," a dialogue movie. "Ice Age II" has outsold "M.I. III" overseas with more than \$170 million at the box office, according to [Boxofficemojo.com](http://Boxofficemojo.com), proving dialogue movies can succeed in the international market. But then again, Sid the Sloth has more personality than Tom Cruise. And here I refer to the actual Tom Cruise, not his film characters.

What's really bothersome about "M.I. III" is it's yet another movie in which, once you know the shocking revelation at the end, nothing that occurred previously makes any sense. Indolent directors and scriptwriters have taken to constructing films in which mysterious events happen, and then in the last reel audiences discover that nothing was what it seemed. But once you know the shocking revelation, if you go back and watch the movie again, characters were busily doing things that made no sense based on the true motivations eventually revealed. In the listless 1994 flick

"Maverick," the Big Shock at the end is that James Garner, Mel Gibson and Jodie Foster, who spent the previous two hours trying to double-cross each other, were working together all along. Then why did they spend the previous two hours trying to double-cross each other? (Amazon or any similar store will sell you, for 10 bucks, a DVD of the three best episodes of the wonderful "Maverick" television series from 1958 -- buy one and reminisce about the bygone time when Hollywood understood the word "subtle.") Or consider that in "X-Men III," audiences learn the previously saintly Jean Grey is not only the most powerful mutant but harbors an evil-twin personality bent on destroying the world. When we find out Professor Xavier has known this all along, significant aspects of the previous two films cease to make sense. In the previous movies, Xavier made Grey the sole person besides himself with a password to activate the super-dangerous Cerebro machine; while warning none of the others about Grey's hidden psyche nor preparing any contingency plan to contain her evil personality if it broke free. Which of course it does in "X-Men III," creating much of the action.

Now to the Big Shock at the end of "M.I. III." Throughout the movie it appears Brassel (Laurence Fishburne), head of the Agency Far, Far More Secret Than the CIA, is a traitor in league with terrorists. It appears his deputy, Musgrave (Billy Crudup), is the sole patriotic high official at the agency, and that Musgrave is risking his life by helping Cruise move against Brassel to defeat the supervillain. As you have guessed, the shocker at the end is that Musgrave turns out to be the traitor and Brassel the patriot. Once you know this, **NOTHING THAT HAPPENED BEFORE MAKES ANY SENSE.**

To begin the movie, Musgrave calls Cruise out of retirement and directs him to Germany to rescue an Impossible Mission Force operative being held by the supervillain. But Cruise is the greatest secret agent in the world. If Musgrave was in league with the supervillain, why did he go out of his way to put the greatest secret agent in the world on the trail of his ally?



Maybe Katie Holmes would be happier with Sid the Sloth?

After Cruise loses the supervillain during the battle on the bridge, Brassel sends Impossible Mission agents to seize Cruise by force. This makes moviegoers think Brassel must be the traitor. But if Brassel is actually the good guy, what possible reason would he have for having armed men threaten to kill his best agent? At headquarters, Brassel declares Cruise to be the traitor and orders him imprisoned; our hero escapes following an extremely improbable fistfight in which he requires mere seconds to knock unconscious three much larger agents. If Brassel was the good guy it made no sense for him to order his best agent imprisoned, plus it would have been obvious to Brassel that Cruise would not orchestrate an all-out attack against himself. Ridiculously, Brassel has Cruise gagged before our hero is brought inside headquarters. This scene is designed to make viewers think Brassel must be totally evil -- the seeming reason for the gag is so that Cruise cannot yell out, "The director is a mole!" But if Brassel is the good guy then the gag makes ABSOLUTELY NO SENSE, since it prevents Brassel from asking Cruise what the heck happened at the bridge.



It's always nice to see Maggie Q.

Nonsense bonus No. 1: In "M.I. III," not only do the good guys' radios work deep inside buildings where there are no "repeaters," and not only are the radios never overheard by bad guys, the radios appear to work telepathically. Cruise and his pals speak to each other over long distances continuously -- yet they aren't carrying any radios, batteries or microphones, and there are no earpieces in their ears.

Nonsense bonus No. 2: In "M.I. III," Cruise steals from the Chinese military a bioweapon substance that is supposedly ultra-deadly. The stuff is held in a glass cylinder that ends up dropped, kicked, rolling down the street and so on. If you possessed an ultra-deadly substance, would you keep it in a *glass* cylinder? And if you knew that secret agents from around the world were trying to steal your bioweapon, would you store it in a small container that a person could grab and run away with? Maybe you'd use a 10-ton chamber set in concrete. In many recent movies, ultra-deadly substances have been depicted as stored in easily grabbed, easily broken containers. For instance in "The Rock," after Nicholas Cage and Sean Connery single-handedly defeat dozens of heavily armed mercenaries, they reach the laboratory where the ultra-deadly bioweapon is hidden. The substance is kept in little globes of what appears to be the most delicate Lomonosov porcelain.

Superheroes Note: That previous action makes no sense in light of subsequent revelations is the reverse of "retcon" or "retroactive continuity." Retcon is the lifeblood of movie sequels and comic-book universes. More on retcon in a later column.

**Semi-Defense of John Madden:** Bernie Lincicome of the Rocky Mountain News argued last week that John Madden's entrance into the Hall of Fame has "lowered standards" so much that now half the coaches in the NFL can consider themselves Canton-caliber. Of Hall of Fame entrant coaches, Madden is on the bottom rung for on-field accomplishments. Madden coached only 112 wins and one championship. Vince Lombardi had fewer total wins, but those dazzling five championships; Bill Walsh -- slightly fewer wins, but three championships; statistically, Madden clearly bests [only Greasy Neale](#). Lincicome asks if Madden wasn't really given the garish yellow jacket in return for his prominence as an announcer.

But nearly all the Hall of Fame selectors [are print journalists](#). Print journalists commonly feel Madden is a mediocre announcer, and some think Madden harmed pro football with the loud-

mouthed-buffoon act he used early in his broadcast career. Some Hall selectors also resent Madden's condescending attitude toward the little people of print, and while personal feelings aren't supposed to matter in awards selections, they matter anyway. Tuesday Morning Quarterback believes Madden does belong in the Hall -- but for his football game, not his booth work. Maybe computer football would have become just as chic if EA's 1991 path-breaking game had been called Wayne Fontes Football. But Madden was there first, and the incredible popularity of electronic football has been a factor in the NFL's ever-rising popularity. The combination of an above-average coaching career and helping launch the electronic football universe is what qualifies Madden for Canton.

Last week Lesley Visser became the first woman to win the Hall of Fame's [Pete Rozelle Award](#), given annually for contributions to radio and television coverage of football. In 2005 the award went to Pittsburgh radio voice Myron Cope, and he delivered such a lengthy, incoherent oration at the Hall of Fame annual dinner that producers cued the orchestra to drown him out -- pretty embarrassing. With Visser, things went a lot more smoothly. [Here is Tuesday Morning Quarterback praising Visser years ago.](#)

**Frostback Preposterous Punt:** Trailing Calgary 16-6, Saskatchewan faced third-and-2 -- the CFL equivalent of fourth-and-2 -- on the Stampeders' 48 with 6:37 gone in the fourth quarter. You cannot seriously be sending in the punt unit! Boom went the punt, and though it rolled into the end zone for a CFL single, anyone taking notes should have written "game over" in their notebook. There's barely even a need to add that the Stampeders required just four snaps to take the ball the other way for the touchdown that iced the game at 23-7. It's the fourth quarter, you're down by two scores and in opposition territory. Why are you punting?

Rules note: In the CFL, zebras throw the flag for "objectionable conduct." Check [the CFL rulebook](#), which bans "equipment or apparel that may ... confuse opponents." Hey number 76! You take off that moose mask right now or it's objectionable conduct!

**Another Defense of Dan Snyder!:** Washington-area television stations and newspapers -- bearing in mind the "Washington" in Washington Redskins means Maryland and Virginia -- are upset that Chainsaw Dan is slowly asserting control of the team's media presentation. Coaches and players are shunning interviews with local network affiliates and with the Washington Post, appearing instead on [Redskins TV](#), a streaming video broadcast controlled by the club. Redskins TV is offering original team programming, plus live broadcasts of training camp and press conferences. Snyder reasons, why do you need the local sportscaster to filter the press conference for you if you can just watch the whole thing yourself on the Redskins' site? The Skins' local radio agreement expired this year, and rather than put the contract out for bid, Snyder bought three radio stations and will broadcast the games. Finally, Chainsaw Dan has declared war on the Washington Post, openly criticizing the paper and prohibiting the Post from buying season tickets. Ostensibly Post season tickets were canceled because Redskins personnel found some being re-sold on services such as eBay. The real reason was to retaliate against the Post for not granting Snyder the sort of reverential coverage enjoyed by the team's previous owner, Jack Kent Cooke.



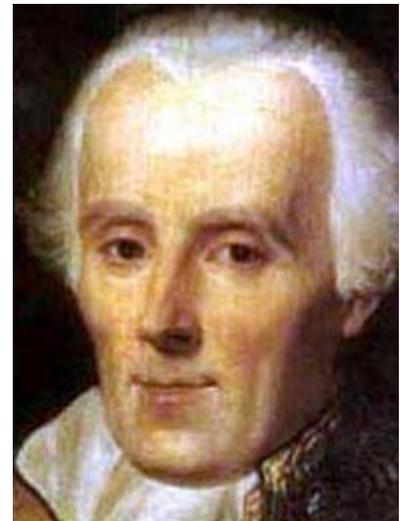
Lesley Visser, a pioneer in sports journalism.

The Redskins taking over their own broadcasting might or might not be a good idea; my guess is that it's not. Chainsaw Dan wants to control the way the team is presented to the world, and also to sell the accompanying ad space. He figures, why should the Post or a local network affiliate get the revenue from ads that accompany stories about the Redskins, instead of the Redskins getting that revenue? The danger is that long-term, Redskins-produced Redskins media will be bland in-house stuff, and audiences will lose interest. Sports owners tend to see sportswriters and sportscasters as mere stenographers. But in economic terms, the sports media adds considerable value -- value in this case being anything from smart analysis to snarky complaining. Audiences for Redskins' in-house productions won't get smart or snarky, they will only get the company line. That might not be good for the Redskins long-term. It's the same basic problem the league faces with the NFL Network experiment. Short-term, the NFL Network diverts to the league advertising revenue that would otherwise go to ESPN, Fox and so on. Long term, NFL-produced NFL coverage might cause a reduction in enthusiasm for the sport.

These things said, if Snyder wants to try controlling his message, why shouldn't he? The same technological trends that are significantly improving and democratizing fan access to football -- broadband Internet, cheap computers, falling costs of communication -- also make possible Redskins TV. Yours truly doesn't like Redskins TV. I'd much rather watch the local sports anchor or some really sharp ESPN person making Joe Gibbs squirm, or read a clever Washington Post sportswriter doing the same. But you can't have the parts of the Web you like without the parts you don't like. You can't have ESPN Motion without also having Redskins TV. Technology is allowing practically any content to move cheaply across the Internet, and in general this is great. If it also leads to Redskins TV, isn't it Snyder's prerogative to try the idea and see what happens?

As for Chainsaw Dan's campaign against the Washington Post, this seems pretty stupid. The Post is a fine newspaper with a top-notch sports section -- if Snyder were to go on a charm-offensive, his coverage there would rapidly sweeten. Regardless, someone in a high-profile position like his must learn that criticism comes with the territory, and 99 percent of the time it's more effective to ignore critics than retaliate against them. Maybe the Post would like the Redskins' owner better if he styled himself Daniel Marc Snyder!

**News from Space:** Ray Jayawardhana of the University of Toronto led researchers who recently discovered a tiny almost-star whose companion is a Jupiter-sized planet; the two orbit each other, rather than orbit a true star. The objects have been designated Oph 162225-240515 -- "Oph1622 for short," as the university's press release dryly notes. What's interesting about the pair is that they are not part of a conventional star system with a massive sun at the center. This calls into question standard theories of how stars and planets form. Since Pierre-Simon LaPlace published "Celestial Mechanics" in 1799, the assumption has been that star systems form out of large swirling nebulae of interstellar gas and matter. The light elements end up in the center and ignite as a sun, while the heavy elements end up farther out on the disc and coalesce into planets. Standard theories hold that tremendous amounts of matter, and thereby tremendous gravity, are needed to form a star, while planets can form only on the star's outer boundary. Yet the Oph1622 pair appear to have formed in the absence of tremendous gravity, plus with star and planet sharing the same orbital track. Asked by Napoleon what



Looks like Pierre-Simon LaPlace didn't know everything.

role in the creation of star systems is played by God, LaPlace famously replied, "Je n'ai pas besoin de cette hypothèse," -- "I do not need this hypothesis." Now it seems there is something very basic unknown to LaPlace and his modern counterparts -- some way stellar objects can form without a nebula of great mass. Perhaps God is chortling, "Je n'ai pas besoin de l'hypothèse de LaPlace."

Meanwhile astronomers at the University of Chile discovered a "brown dwarf" about 16 light-years from Earth, close in galactic terms. Brown dwarfs are small star-like bodies similar to the star-like body in Oph1622 -- made of the stuff of suns, but not engaged in nuclear fusion. The new discovery, designated Den 0255-4700, is another of many recent findings suggesting that the galactic neighborhood close to Earth is significantly richer in stars, planets and other cosmic objects than astronomers only recently assumed. [Here, for example, is another newly found brown dwarf](#) about 12 light-years distant. These discoveries suggest that once people devise the means to journey out of our solar system, there will be many relatively nearby destinations from which to choose.

**New Deal Details:** Stated in today's dollars, the first salary cap in 1994 was \$44 million; the 2006 cap is \$102 million. That's a 132 percent real-dollar increase in player earnings. Over just a dozen years, the NFL golden goose more than doubled the real-dollar sum earned by players -- no other sport comes close. Nor does any white-collar profession. During the same period when NFL pay was rising 132 percent, inflation-adjusted earnings by surgeons rose 29 percent, for example. Now consider that two franchises have been added since 1994, meaning more players have access to the much larger pot, while pension benefits for retired players have steadily increased. Overall, in 1994 about \$1.5 billion was paid to NFL active and retired players; in 2006, about \$3.7 billion will be. Remember, I'm stating all figures in today's dollars, so the huge increases are after inflation.

(Here's the fine print. Most teams do not max out the salary cap, but on the other hand playing-time bonuses for low-paid players, plus pension and health-care benefits for retired players, do not count against the cap. In 2006, about \$18 million per team will be spent on retired-player benefits, this money moving outside the cap framework. When retired players are added to the calculation, total spending on players is somewhat above the salary cap.)

There is also now a cap floor that mandates minimum spending. This year the floor is 84 percent of \$102 million, meaning teams must spend a minimum of \$86 million on players -- and \$86 million was last year's maximum! Next year the salary cap floor will be 90 percent of \$109 million, mandating teams spend at least \$98 million on players. Owing to the new cap floor, total monies paid to active players will rise by at least 20 percent in the first two years of the new agreement, which is simply outstanding. And that \$3.7 billion in payments to players in 2006? If that number strikes you as familiar, it should -- \$3.7 billion is the amount the league will earn in 2006 from its rich new network deals. In effect every dollar paid to the NFL by ESPN, CBS, DirecTV, Fox and NBC goes directly to the players. Ticket sales cover the clubs' non-player expenses, while owners make their money on the third and least lucrative category, all the miscellaneous other stuff.

**TMQ in the News:** Last week your columnist was on "Newshour with Jim Lehrer," PBS's ultra-serious evening news show, talking about global warming. Note they [identified me](#) as "Gregg Easterbrook, Brookings Institution." Not "Gregg Easterbrook, ESPN."

**Bonus Movie Complaint:** The new "Miami Vice" movie was promoted with the weird tag line, "Crime without compromise." What was this supposed to mean, that the movie was unafraid to glamorize crime? Surely it could not have meant the movie depicted crime realistically, since "Miami Vice" is about as realistic as a Pokemon film. Consider just the body count. According to the FBI's Uniform Crime Reports, there were [54 murders in Miami last year](#). That's plenty bad enough, but the murder rate depicted in "Miami Vice" projects out to thousands per annum. Also according to the FBI, three law enforcement officers were killed in the line of duty in Florida last year, none in Miami-Dade County and none in drug-related incidents. That's plenty bad enough, but compared to the movie ...

**Reader Animadversion:** Got a complaint or a deeply held grievance? Write me at [TMQ\\_ESPN@yahoo.com](mailto:TMQ_ESPN@yahoo.com). Include your real name and the name of your hometown, and I may quote you by name unless you instruct me otherwise.

**Next Week:** My AFC preview, plus Paul Bunyan demands a retraction.



Crockett and Tubbs have their work cut out for them.

**Monday, August 14, 2006**  
**Updated: August 15, 7:11 PM ET**  
TMQ AFC Preview

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By Gregg Easterbrook

This time of year, many NFL teams are crowing about the new offense they are installing. Teams installing a new offense for 2006 include the Bills, Dolphins, Jets, Lions, Rams, Redskins, Saints and Vikings. Often "new offense" means that instead of saying "power 80 slide quick," the quarterback will say "blue X-under 247." Both translate as "square out right" -- much of the installation of a new offense boils down to new terminology for standard plays. But there's a larger trend. In recent years, NFL offenses have converged toward a homogeneous product where everybody runs roughly the same stuff, hybridizing previously distinct offenses.

As recently as 15 years ago, some teams were power rush, some teams were run-and-shoot (no tight end, three small receivers running complex crossing patterns), some teams were West Coast (most passes short), some teams were Bart Starr classic (don't throw much but when you do, throw deep), some teams were hurry-up -- there were distinctly different philosophies of offense. Now everybody's using a little of everything. For instance, the five-wide, empty-backfield set, which a decade ago only a few teams were willing to show, is now in every NFL playbook. It's now in every high school team's playbook! The "bunch," which in the early 1990s only Minnesota was using, now shows up everywhere. Once only Buffalo and Cincinnati would go no-huddle before the last two minutes; now most teams show this tactic occasionally. And with the exception of Arizona and Philadelphia, everyone's run/pass ratio has converged. Nobody in the NFL has tried the Texas Tech offense yet: very wide splits from the linemen, emphasis on throwing lanes. But otherwise, in recent seasons every team has sampled a little of every offensive philosophy.

The kickoff game this season is Miami at Pittsburgh. Twenty years ago that game would have matched distinctly different offensive philosophies: power rush versus an up-the-field passing game based on the post and sideline fly. In 2006, the Dolphins and Steelers likely will show a similar mix of formations and plays. Everybody's trying a little bit of everything. It is, after all, the 21st century.

In other football news, who are Tony Romo, Earnest Graham and Rashied Davis? The NFL's leading [passer, rusher and receiver](#). Enjoy your 15 minutes of fame, gentlemen. Now my AFC preview.

### **Baltimore**

It's 2006, do you know who the Ravens' quarterback is? Since arriving in Charm City a decade ago, the Ravens have started quarterbacks Tony Banks, Jeff Blake, Kyle Boller, Stoney Case, Randall Cunningham, Trent Dilfer, Elvis Grbac, Jim Harbaugh, Scott Mitchell, Chris Redman, Vinny Testaverde, Anthony Wright and Eric Zeier. Now Steve McNair takes over. Fourteen quarterbacks in 10 seasons -- honk if you've played quarterback for the Baltimore Ravens! Brian Billick is supposed to be an offensive genius, yet can't keep a quarterback on the field. Of the multitude of starters only one worked out: Dilfer, who brought home a Super Bowl ring. Billick immediately got rid of the guy.

It's become a broken record for the Ravens: plenty of defense, little offense. Last year Baltimore finished fifth in defense (yards allowed), 25th in offense (yards gained). The year before the Ravens were sixth in defense, 31st in offense. The year before that fourth in defense, 20th in offense. Lather, rinse, repeat. Billick came to the Nevermores with a rep as an offensive guru, but

increasingly that seems a fluke of his being offensive coordinator of the 1998 Vikings, who had the NFL's highest-scoring season ever at 556 points. That was a stacked team on offense that played indoors. Gary Anderson, Cris Carter, Jeff Crisby, Randall Cunningham, Randall McDaniel, Randy Moss, Robert Smith, Todd Steussie and Corey Stringer -- nine Pro-Bowl caliber offensive stars in their primes, plus other quality players such as Chris Liwienski and Jake Reed. Hard upon the heels of the 556-point season, Billick was hired to be Baltimore's coach. Since then he has had average offensive talent and coached seven consecutive poor seasons on offense.

You can see how frustrated Billick is. It's painful to watch him on the sidelines during games. Whenever the Baltimore offense trots onto the field, Billick starts to wince. At the first incomplete pass or stuffed run, he throws something. By the start of the second quarter, Billick is making all manner of ugly faces. You'd be frustrated too if you were supposed to be an offensive guru and had overseen seven consecutive poor offensive seasons. But coach, maybe a little Positive Mental Attitude is in order. Read your Norman Vincent Peale. Ravens offensive players pick up the vibration that you expect them to fail. Every team has incompletions; stopping freaking out about them.

**Ravens note No. 1:** Despite its image as a dangerous club, Baltimore has lost its opener four consecutive years.

**Ravens note No. 2:** Why did Baltimore give up a fourth-round choice for McNair, knowing the Titans would cut him anyway? Tennessee could not have signed its draft choices without unloading McNair's \$9 million salary. Also, it's rumored Baltimore relieved Tennessee of a \$1 million bonus due to McNair, so in effect, Baltimore sent the Flaming Thumbtacks a fourth-round choice plus \$1 million in salary cap room -- nice price for a player who would have been waived soon.

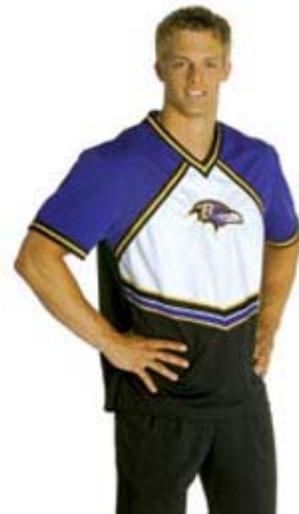
**Ravens note No. 3:** The Ravens and M&T Bank Stadium put on one of the best game-day experiences in the NFL, with a marching band (now rare in the pros), artsy National Anthem performers, scantily clad cheer-babes and the league's only cheer-hunks. [Here is the very studly Sean](#). But even though for warm-weather games the Ravens' women wear next to nothing, the men are fully clothed in running suits. Come on, it's the 21st century -- shorts and sleeveless tees to entertain the female demographic, please.

### **Buffalo**

Last summer TMQ's AFC preview said Bills coaches faced "a vexing choice, whether to sacrifice the season to the education of J.P. Losman" or play veteran Kelly Holcomb and try for the postseason. Instead Buffalo did neither: The Bills started Losman for a while, then Holcomb for a while, then Losman, then Holcomb. The result was a worst-case outcome: Losman did not have his learning year and the Bills did not mount a playoff run. Departed coach Mike Mularkey wasted the 2005 Buffalo season by refusing to make up his mind about who should be under center. Compare to Marvin Lewis, who in 2004 stuck



Norman Vincent Peale was all about positive thinking.



Gotta wonder how much cheer-hunks get paid ...

with Carson Palmer during Palmer's learning season, and in 2005 was rewarded with premium quarterbacking. Because 2005 was bungled away, Buffalo again faces the choice it faced last year: keep Losman on the field and let him struggle, or let Holcomb try to gain the team its first playoff appearance of the 21st century.

After winning more games than any NFL team during the 1990s, Buffalo has been one of the league's worst clubs in the new century. Maybe the football gods are simply balancing the books. Quarterback turmoil and poor offensive lines have been themes of the Bills' decline. Since Jim Kelly retired nine years ago, Buffalo has invested in the quarterback position three first-round draft picks, one second-round pick, plus third-, fourth- and fifth-round choices -- and has no clear starter to show for it. Plus, the Bills just passed on drafting Matt Leinart, arguably the most Kelly-like signal caller to leave the collegiate ranks since Kelly last taped his ankles. Yumpin' yiminy.

The Bills also have struggled under novice coaches. Former president Tom Donohue hired two consecutive gents with no pro or college head coaching experience: the tastefully named Gregg Williams, then Mularkey. Both were in over their heads. Now the Bills finally have a taskmaster with substantial head coaching experience, and Dick Jauron is well-regarded. But there's a comparison that concerns TMQ. As this column has documented, over the last five seasons Williams and Mularkey led the league in Preposterous Punts: punting in opposition territory, even when trailing or facing fourth-and-short. Two of many examples: Trailing New England by 10, Williams ordered the Bills to punt from the Pats' 32 on fourth-and-2; trailing San Diego by 25, Mularkey ordered a punt from the Chargers' 40. Now I review my file on Jauron and find it contains numerous entries regarding him ordering Preposterous Punts. Last year, the Lions were trailing Cincinnati by 17 in the second half, facing fourth-and-1 at midfield: Jauron sent in the punter. From that play on, the Lions were clobbered. Is there one chance in a million Bill Belichick orders a punt on fourth-and-1 at midfield when down by three scores in the second half? Victories don't come in the mail, they must be seized. Buffalo gets its third consecutive coach with a weird tendency to punt the ball away in scoring position, rather than go all-out to win.

**Bills note No. 1:** One of Marv Levy's opening moves was to give up on tackle Mike Williams, the fourth overall choice in 2002 and among the worst draft busts in NFL history. A reason the Bills have descended toward the cellar is the 2002 draft -- Buffalo had the fourth overall choice plus two second-round selections, yet likely will have no 2006 starter to show for it.

**Bills note No. 2:** With the trade of Eric Moulds to Houston, there is no one left on the Buffalo roster who played with Kelly. The last link to Buffalo's Golden Age is gone.

### **Cincinnati**

Sure, it was a strange experience last year writing about the Cincinnati Bengals as contenders. And remember, despite losing Palmer on the second snap of their playoff game against Pittsburgh, Cincy led the eventual Super Bowl winners at halftime. The knockout play of that game was not Palmer's injury, rather, Cincinnati's field-goal attempt midway through the third quarter. Leading 17-14, the Bengals botched a try from the Pittsburgh 15. A 20-14 lead at that point would have been significant. Instead, the Steelers were energized, scoring touchdowns on their next two possessions. Then the clock struck midnight on the Bengals' magical season.

Other than those who might be jailed, Cincinnati returns all starters from 2005 and so should contend again. If you want Bengals tix you're too late -- all Cincinnati home games are already sold out. The Bengals of 2005 were the mirror image of the Ravens: plenty of offense (fourth in points), suspect defense (22nd in points). Tuesday Morning Quarterback does not place much score by looking ahead to the schedule before the season starts. Dates that seem like monster games in August might seem ho-hum by November, while games that seem like sure wins have a way of becoming Waterloos. Nevertheless, checking Cincinnati's schedule we observe that the Bengals' final three dates are at Indianapolis on Monday Night Football, at Denver and then playing host to Pittsburgh. That's as impressive a sequence of games as any team faces in 2006.



The season's biggest battles can't all be predicted in August.

**Bengals note No. 1:** Josh LeFevre of Cincinnati was among many readers to propose TMQ resume calling this team the Candy Corns: "The Bengals look much more like giant Candy Corns running around than they look like giant Tootsie Rolls." See [Page 30](#) of this section of the team's press guide for a five-page history of Cincinnati's constant changes in its Halloween-themed uniforms.

**Bengals note No. 2:** [Here](#), the team's FAQs page explains why the scoreboard at Paul Brown Stadium will not announce proposals of marriage.

**Bengals note No. 3:** To speed response to the string of Bengals in trouble with the law, the Cincinnati media relations department now uses this fill-in-the-blank press release:

CINCINNATI, XX DATE. The Cincinnati Bengals today announced that player (\_\_\_\_\_) has been arrested and charged with (\_\_\_\_\_\_). Witnesses said he was also caught in possession of (\_\_\_\_\_) and was waving (\_\_\_\_\_\_). "We apologize to our fans for the (\_\_\_\_\_)th time," coach Marvin Lewis said. After arraignment, the player was returned to team headquarters, "where he can be with his peer group," sources said. Hey kids! Did you know there is now a collectible series of trading cards based on replicas of arrest warrants for Cincinnati Bengals? Collect them all today!

### Cleveland

Since rematerializing in the NFL in 1999, the club this column first called the Cleveland Browns (version 2.0), then the Browns 2.1, and last season was calling the Browns (3.0 Beta), has had only one winning season. The Browns have myriad problems, starting with their roster: no Cleveland player has made the Pro Bowl as a Brown, which is especially awful considering the cornucopia of high draft picks. It's not just the well-known first-round picks who never produced: Tim Couch, Courtney Brown, Gerald Warren, William Green. Who are Rahim Abdullah, Andre Davis and Kevin Johnson? Recent high second-round picks who didn't pan out either. (Though [Abdullah has ripped up the CFL](#).) Meanwhile the Browns' first choices of 2004 and 2005, Kellen Winslow Jr. and Braylon Edwards, have yet to do anything.

Pretty much every other barometer about Cleveland is negative, too. Only 232 points scored in 2005, worst in the league. Back-to-back losses to Detroit and Houston: that hurts. A 41-0 punch in the nose by Pittsburgh. A miserable 36-78 record since re-entering the league. A quarterback of the future, Charlie Frye, with a 69.8 passer rating.

And yet -- and yet. Cleveland's got Romeo Crennel, and you know in your bones he will be an NFL success. Last year the Browns shut out the Dolphins, and played credible games against

Indianapolis and Cincinnati. Then there's that Cleveland crowd energy. Browns Stadium is not the loudest in the league, but somehow is most energetic -- Cleveland spectators have maintained full enthusiasm despite that 36-78 number. If this year's iteration can mount any kind of respectable September, the Browns surely will have the wind at their backs in terms of public support.

**Browns note:** Though Cleveland struggled on the field, it leads the league in [mascots](#).

### **Denver**

Talk about lather, rinse, repeat: The Broncos are stuck in a cycle of great regular seasons followed by playoff wheeze-outs. Over the last three years the Broncos have gone 33-15 in the regular season, 1-3 in the playoffs. In that span, their scoring margin in regular-season games is plus-8 points -- in playoff games it's minus-15. Each collapse has included the vaunted Denver running game disappearing in the playoffs. During the 2004 regular season, Denver had the league's fourth-best rushing attack. Then in the playoffs, the Broncos rushed for an anemic 78 yards. During the 2005 regular season, Denver had the league's second-best rushing attack. Then in losing the AFC Championship Game at home in the thin mountain air, which offers little resistance to running backs, the Broncos were held to 97 yards rushing.

How to explain Denver's January folds? One explanation might be that the depleted air at 5,208 feet is a bigger home-team advantage during the regular season, when a visitor can lose without his season ending, than during the postseason, when everyone plays on pure adrenaline. In the last three seasons, the Broncos are 21-5 at home, 13-13 on the road. Over the past decade, Denver has the best home-field record, a sterling 64-14. But if the Broncos played at sea level, they'd lose at least one more home date per year. Denver's incredible altitude-based home-field advantage might make the team overconfident. During the regular season the Broncos cruise to relatively easy home wins over opponents gasping for air, and need only a few road wins to qualify for the postseason. But when the postseason arrives, Denver is on the road or facing an extremely pumped opponent not intimidated by the altitude.

The Broncos have a lot of strengths, none more important than their offensive line. Chop blocks aside, all Broncos offensive linemen have played their entire careers for Denver, and four of five current starters have been together five years. Offensive line cohesion is an overlooked essential of football success. Last year's Super Bowl teams, Seattle and Pittsburgh, both sported offensive lines composed of high draft choices who had significant time together as units. Four of the five Steelers offensive line starters had played only for Pittsburgh; three of the five Seahawks offensive linemen only for Seattle. Yet many teams don't get the message of offensive line cohesion, constantly shuffling blockers or treating them as disposable. Len Pasquarelli recently noted that in the last decade, NFL teams averaged 2.2 new offensive line starters per season. Teams that win on a consistent basis keep their offensive lines together.

**Broncos note No. 1:** Here's the net of Denver's four high-profile trades in this year's draft. The Broncos swapped the 22nd and 29th selections of the first round, two third-round choices and a fourth-round pick in 2007 for Jay Cutler and Javon Walker. That's a pretty penny. Of course, Denver has wasted so many high picks in recent years, the Broncos might feel that high picks aren't really worth conserving.

**Broncos note No. 2:** It's not that oxygen is lacking in the Denver air, it's that pressure is lacking. The oxygen ratio of air in Denver is the same as at sea level, but lower pressure means less air of all kinds. Barometric pressure at 5,208 feet is 625 millimeters per hectogram, versus 760 millimeters per hectogram at sea level. This leaves only 81 percent of the oxygen molecules per volume of air in Denver as at sea level. Athletes who train at high altitude develop more hemoglobin, which

compensates for low air pressure. Young, healthy people arriving in Denver from sea level begin producing more hemoglobin in two to three days, which is why smart teams should fly in early when playing Denver.

**Broncos note No. 3:** While air pressure in Denver is low, natural background radiation is high. Denver residents receive, on average, 400 millirems per year of natural radiation, [versus 300 millirems for sea-level Americans](#). Colorado residents also live longer than Americans as a whole, and suffer lower cancer rates, leading to the puzzle that mild exposure to low amounts of radiation is not harmful and may even be beneficial. Alternatively, Colorado's outdoor lifestyle might account for the state's longevity stats. Whatever the answer, Tuesday Morning Quarterback has long believed radiation is good for beauty, since [the Broncos' cheerleaders](#) consistently finish top five for TMQ Cheerleader of the Week distinction.



One of the top squads in the NFL -- the Broncos' cheerleaders.

**Big Plus: Parking Cannot Be Outsourced To India:** Parking -- not the kind you did as a teenager -- is now a \$500 billion industry worldwide. That sum is larger than the United States' defense budget, and represented about 2 percent of the global GDP in 2004. This means the world now spends on parking roughly what it spends on environmental protection, and considerably more than it spends on all books and libraries combined. If parking has become a major industry, there must be a trade association for parking. And there is: the International Parking Institute. [Click here](#) for info on its educational seminars, annual conferences, awards for excellence and trade magazine, Parking Professional. Awards for parking excellence? Parking is a leading hassle of modern life -- society has an interest in encouraging well-planned and well-operated parking facilities. [Click here](#) for the story of Mark Schtul, a parking expert who was late to speak at an urban-planning conference because he couldn't find a parking space.



Hmmm ... sports journalism is cool and all, but maybe we should have gone into parking?

### Houston

In four years of existence, the Houston Texans have won 10 home games. That is not very good. Houston has the same core problem as the Browns: namely, its players. Return man Jerome Mathis and wide receiver Andre Johnson are the sole gentlemen on the roster who have made the Pro Bowl as a Texan. Check the [Houston depth chart](#) -- it's not for the faint of heart. Offensive line woes have exemplified this team's struggles; the Texans have surrendered 229 sacks in four years. No team can give up 57 sacks per season and be a contender. Yet year after year, Houston neglects the offensive line in the offseason. Consult the depth chart for the all-important left tackle position: Listed first is Seth Wand, who did not start in 2005, and his backup is draft choice Charles Spencer, who played only one year at left tackle in college.

**Moo Cows note:** Title inflation has come to the NFL, and no team is more inflated than the Texans. Houston has a CEO, a chairman, a vice chairman, a president, a general manager, three senior vice presidents, six regular vice presidents, 11 directors, a controller, a coordinator, and someone with the title "risk manager." The Texans are roughly a \$250 million per year business, small in corporate terms -- that's about the annual revenue of 10 Macy's department stores. But being small does not seem to prevent the Texans from needing loads of people with imperious titles. If Exxon Mobil had the same ratio of titles to sales as the Houston Texans, Exxon Mobil would boast 4,584 senior vice presidents, 9,168 vice presidents and 16,808 directors.



There are certainly a lot of hands in the kitchen in Houston.

### **Indianapolis**

Everybody talked about the Triplets of the Colts' offense, but last year it was really the Septuplets: Dallas Clark, Marvin Harrison, Edgerrin James, Peyton Manning, Jeff Saturday, Reggie Wayne and Ryan Lilja, an unknown who had a Hawaii-caliber season. Since six of those seven remain, another big offensive season should be expected.

Can the team's psyche recover from last season's playoff deflation and from the lingering sadness of the suicide of Tony Dungy's son? Like Denver, Indianapolis of late has been great in the regular season and awful in the postseason -- and the Colts' playoff record would look worse if they hadn't gotten two shots at Denver in January. In the last three years Indianapolis is 38-10 in the regular season, 2-3 in the postseason; for his coaching career, Tony Dungy is 102-58 in the regular season, 5-8 in the postseason. Perhaps James Dungy's death a few days before Christmas rendered irrelevant anything the Colts did in subsequent games. Somehow you felt the Colts' spirit was already wavering before the tragedy.

Indianapolis jumped out 13-0, then went 1-3 the remainder of the season. Once 13-0 was reached, the Colts had locked up home-field advantage throughout the playoffs and Dungy told the team they would not go all-out to win the final three games. At that point, which came before James' suicide, esprit seemed to depart from the squad. Yours truly wrote at the time that in order to keep the Colts fired up, Dungy should declare a goal of a 16-0 season, publicly challenging his team to be the first to reach this mark. Instead there was a month between the last regular-season game Indianapolis played full-bore to win, a Dec. 11 victory over Jacksonville to reach 13-0, to the next time the Colts went full-bore, their Jan. 15 postseason loss to Pittsburgh. In the first half of the Pittsburgh loss, the Colts looked fuzzy and out of synch; by the second half they were red-hot and the Steelers had to hang on to prevail. You can't help but feel Dungy's decision not to go all-out to win after 13-0 cost Indianapolis its edge.

**Colts note:** Indiana taxpayers, you might watch your tax dollars disappear [here](#), a webcam of the construction of the team's new stadium.

### **Jacksonville**

The Jaguars quietly compiled a 12-4 record in 2005, a record that would have won six of the eight divisions last season. Then Jacksonville dematerialized in the playoffs, losing 28-3 at New England to end their season. But Jacksonville's season really ended a month before, and there's a harmonic convergence here with Indianapolis' demise. Jacksonville's year really ended when the Jags played

host to Indianapolis on Dec. 11. Coming into that game, the 12-0 Colts were the toast of the sports-yak universe, while Jax was determined to prove itself a true contender. Jacksonville took the opening kickoff and drove to fourth-and-1 on the Indianapolis 43 -- [and punted](#). Jacksonville punted on fourth-and-1 in the territory of the highest-scoring team in the NFL! Scarcely dost thou even need'st be told that verily the Colts took the ball and flew down the field the other way for a touchdown. Spectators might as well have filed out at that point; as the Jax punt boomed, yours truly wrote the words "game over" in his notebook, earliest time I'd ever writ thus. Game over, though it's scoreless in the first quarter! Sooth, was true. By the start of the fourth quarter the scoreboard read: Indianapolis 23, Jacksonville 3.

In retrospect, one might as well have written "season over" as that punt boomed. Jacksonville knew victory in its final three regular-season games, but against San Francisco, Houston and Tennessee -- three cupcakes with cherries on top. Then the Jags were pasted by New England in the postseason. Look back on the Jacksonville schedule from 2005, and you'll see that early Jax beat both Seattle and Pittsburgh, the Super Bowl pair. But the Oct. 16 victory over the Steelers was the last time in 2005 that Jacksonville defeated a team that finished with a winning record. That Preposterous Punt against Indianapolis not only cost Jax a big game, it seemed to represent the coaching staff's loss of faith in their own season. Note to Jack Del Rio: Victories must be seized, they do not come in the mail.

Jacksonville has used its last two first-round picks on receiver Matt Jones and tight end Mercedes Lewis, yet still looks suspect at receiver owing to the retirement of Jimmy Smith. My 11-year-old, Spenser, a Jax fan, chants ERRNNN-est WIILLL-ford, ERRNNN-est WIILLL-ford during games, because Jacksonville is 6-1 when Ernest Wilford catches a touchdown pass. Unfortunately, K.C. Joyner's nearly omniscient stats say Wilford had *the* [worst drop performance in 2005](#) of all receivers, dropping one in every five passes thrown to him.

**Jacksonville note:** When Smith hung up his cleats, ESPN.com said he was retiring after 11 seasons. NFL.com said after 12 seasons. Sports Illustrated said after 13 seasons. All three reports ran on the same day.

### **Jersey/B**

Conventional wisdom holds the Jets are two years away, since they had a terrible season in 2005, have lost 15 of their last 20 outings stretching back to 2004, and must break in Eric "I Was a Teenaged Coach" Mangini, who lacks head coaching experience. TMQ wonders about the conventional wisdom. First, Jersey/B was clobbered by injuries last season: five guys played quarterback, including the legendary Kliff Kingsbury and Vinny Testaverde, who at this point should be selling Medi-Gap policies on late-night TV. Second, Jersey/B has improved through the subtraction of two malcontents, John Abraham and Herman "I Honor My Contract When I'm In The Mood" Edwards, who quit on the team last season in a way that never would have been tolerated if Edwards was a player. Third, Jersey/B has Mangini, a product of the New England success system. Fourth, the Jets play seven games against teams that finished a combined 24-72 in 2005. Don't assume this is a lost season for Jersey/B -- though discounting expansion teams, the Jets do have the AFC's worst record since the AFL-NFL merger.

**Jets note No. 1:** The team's new training facility and business office will be in Florham Park, N.J., at a complex that was once the corporate headquarters of Exxon. The Jets are leaving their cantonment in Hempstead, N.Y., and that in turn means both of the NFL's supposed "New York" franchises now have no connection whatsoever to New York -- plotting, practicing and performing exclusively in New Jersey.

**Jets note No. 2:** During the 2005 offseason, Laveranues Coles demanded to be traded from Washington because the Redskins' offense was not designed to produce stats for him personally. At Jersey/B, Coles finished the season with 845 yards receiving; at Washington, his replacement, Santana Moss, racked up 1,483 yards. Now Coles is attempting to compile housing stats: Karen Crouse of the New York Times reported he is building a 25,000-square-foot home in Jacksonville, Fla. The mega-manse contains "a movie theater, a gymnasium with bleachers, two bowling lanes, a swimming pool, an indoor golf simulator, an outdoor kitchen and a dance floor." Outdoor kitchen? Gymnasium with bleachers? Crouse described Coles' \$8 million manse as "surrounded on three sides by pine-filled woods." Note: You can't be surrounded "on three sides" -- to surround is to encircle.

**Jets note No. 3:** Mangini has adopted Green and Growing as the Jets' motto. Yes, Weeb Ewbank once used this phrase. So did the Milwaukee Bucks of the late 1970s. Bucks forward Marques Johnson memorably countered, "It makes us sound like some species of mold."

**Superman vs. Mike Tyson Headlines Card:** Computer-generated special effects increasingly render movies unrealistic and thus uninteresting -- film action was much more impressive when a stuntman or stuntwoman actually had to do the stunt. But there's something in the actually done stunt category that drives me nuts: the misrepresentation of the lowly punch. First, in the movies, a single punch often knocks someone cold. In the James Bond flick "Die Another Day," twice Bond knocks someone unconscious with a single punch. In "Mission Impossible III," Tom Cruise knocks several people unconscious on the first punch, and once knocks someone unconscious with a single head-butt. Some of this is Hollywood preposterousness, some of it star ego -- you suspect Cruise wants the scenes to suggest to audiences that he is so incredibly ultra-strong and ultra-fit, one swing of his fist will make a strong man crumple. But though a single-punch knockout is possible in real life, usually real-life fist fights go on for some time.

Worse is the Hollywood punch that sends a person flying backward across the room. You've seen Mike Tyson deliver what might be the most powerful punches in world history -- did the other boxer fly backward across the ring? In order to cause the punched person to fly backward, a punch would have to deliver considerably more force than the person's body weight. And that just don't happen.

Consider a scene in "Superman Returns." Supe is lured to Lex Luthor's crystal island which, the Man of Steel does not know, has kryptonite soil. After waiting long enough for the kryptonite to deprive Superman of his powers, Lex punches him -- and Supe flies backward about 20 feet. Ridiculous! Lex Luthor has no superpowers, he's just an evil genius. Superman has been described earlier in the film as weighing 225 pounds. For Luthor to deliver 225 pounds of force with a single arm would be the rough equivalent of bench-pressing 450 pounds with both arms, and that is the bench-press range of NFL defensive linemen. But Luthor would need to deliver a punch with many times 225 pounds of impact to make Supe fly backwards. Force is inversely proportional to the square of distance. Perhaps some incredibly scientifically advanced reader can figure this out exactly, but my guess is that to cause a 225-pound superhero to fly backward 20 feet, a punch would need to deliver several thousand pounds of force. Multiply that times two for the bench-press ability represented, and you've crossed into the realm of



Sorry, but Kevin Spacey just ain't that strong.

the laughable.

### **Kansas City**

At Kansas City they use the Cover 2: cover two receivers and ignore the rest. The Chiefs of 2005 came very close to being an elite team. They finished 10-6, joining the honor roll of 10-6 clubs that did not make the playoffs. Kansas City was first in the NFL in offense as measured by yards, first in average yards per play with a sparkling 5.8, and near the top for points scored, yards per pass attempt and first downs. The Chiefs also rushed more than they passed, appeasing the football gods. Yet awful defense held Kansas City back. The Chiefs finished 30th in pass defense, and while some of that links to opponents who were behind and threw a lot, most of the explanation is that the Kansas City defense was bad again. As noted by reader David Myszewski of Newark, Calif., the key stat was that Kansas City allowed 5.4 yards per play on defense, 28th in the league. That means it took the Chiefs' opponents an average of two snaps to attain a first down. Those kind of numbers say you can't get the other team off the field, and sure enough Kansas City forced only 69 punts in 2005, versus, say, 97 forced by Chicago.

The weak 2005 defensive showing came after an offseason during which Kansas City management had pledged a major push to get stronger on defense. Now the Chiefs have added Ty Law and Herman "I Honor My Contract When I'm In The Mood" Edwards, both with good reps for defense. But remember, both Bill Belichick and his protégé Eric Mangini didn't want to keep Law around, and this pair has fairly good instincts. Law in April: "I've made five Pro Bowls. I should have made nine, because I feel I got ripped off for four others." Any NFL player who considers himself the victim of injustice because he's only gotten five Pro Bowl garlands has serious me-first issues. Last year with the Jets, Law played for interceptions too often, more concerned with his numbers and free-agency bonus potential than with the Jets' chances of winning.

Who else with the Jets last year was more concerned with himself and his contract than with the Jets? Hey, Herman Edwards! By quitting on the team in midseason and becoming a malcontent in order to force Jersey/B to release him from his obligation, Edwards showed serious me-first issues. Keep this in mind, Kansas City: When you hire someone who's only in it for himself, you get someone who's only in it for himself.

Fantasy players have been falling all over themselves to draft stats machine Larry Johnson, a joy to watch in the open field. But the core of the Chiefs for the last several years has been the NFL's best offensive line. Watch tape of these guys -- they block so effectively it often looks like a walk through session, in which defenders are supposed to step out of the way. Let's give credit where credit is due and name the Chiefs' blockers of 2005: Jordan Black, Willie Roaf, Will Shields, Brian Waters, John Welbourn and Casey Wiegmann. If Roaf really has taped up his ankles for the final time, we say goodbye to one of the best. And remember: Roaf and Wiegmann were shown the door by previous employers who didn't want them, while Waters went undrafted.

**Copy Desk Debate Roils New York Times: Does a Naked Dominatrix "Wiggle" Or "Wriggle?"** Tuesday Morning Quarterback has done not one but two previous items on the sense of civic obligation that moves the august New York Times (that's the august newspaper, not an August edition) to devote space to the vital public-policy issue of the breasts of Las Vegas showgirls. In 2001, the Times ran a Page 1 article on the fact that the traditional feather-boas-and-headdress Vegas topless showgirl was being supplanted by modern, friskier types who gyrate naked, while the traditional elaborately choreographed Vegas showgirl stage extravaganza has given way to edgy revues featuring woman-on-woman erotica. The Times allowed that dancing naked is better for a showgirl's health -- no backaches caused by a heavy headdress! -- and even rolled out a professor described as an "expert" in strip-show culture. Then, in 2004, the Multicolored Lady

delivered a Page 1 article on the vital public-policy implications of nude dancers moving from South Florida, long an exotic dance haven, to Vegas, where tips are better.

Now this Sunday, the New York Times offered a [section-lead feature by Erika Kinetz on Jubilee](#), the last traditional Vegas showgirl production that features beautiful dancers in headdresses performing Busby Berkeley numbers with sets and props. This tradition-honoring review promises "50 stunning topless women" -- only slightly more than in TMQ's standard fantasy. Bear in mind that 50 women dancing topless now seems "traditional." Inevitably this means that at some point Las Vegas reviews comprised of naked women simulating girl-girl sex will be considered "traditional." What, then, will be edgy?



Yeah, that costume looks a little heavy ...

Here's the best quote from Sunday's Times story: The woman who manages the "Jubilee" show told Kinetz audiences "get more value" when showgirls are topless. TMQ is in favor of value! Here's a fun Web game. Want to find the 2001 New York Times showgirls story? Type the search terms "nude," "Las Vegas" and "feather boas" into the [Times search engine](#). Want to find the 2004 story? Type in "dominatrix" and "wiggle naked." Want to find Sunday's story? Enter "topless," "stripper" and "Pussycat Doll Lounge."

### **Miami**

The Marine Mammals seemed strong by the end of 2005, and if they play strong in 2006 they will prove to be an exception to the rule that football-factory college coaches don't transition well into the NFL. Nick Saban seemed to know what he was doing with the team, though he struggled with the personal-comportment part of the college-to-pro adjustment. Coaches at football-factory colleges are little gods worshipped everywhere they walk, while the knives are always out for NFL coaches. Early in his first Dolphins season Saban had several "how dare they criticize me" moments, but by December he seemed to understand that criticism comes with the territory. The question mark is whether Miami's strong finish last year is deceptive. The Dolphins won their final six games, but only one victory (against San Diego) came against a quality team. The other wins were against Oakland, Buffalo, Jersey/B (i.e., the Jets), Tennessee and a New England team resting starters after locking its playoff seeding.

Saban has added Dom Capers and Mike Mularkey as assistants; both were head coaches last year, so Miami now boasts one of the league's most qualified staffs. Capers is likely to replace Miami's conservative, position-oriented defensive philosophy with the zone-blitz scheme perfected by Pittsburgh. How will Mularkey, the league's most conservative play caller, mesh with Daunte Culpepper? KC Joyner's nearly omniscient stats show that in Buffalo last year Mularkey called the fewest deep passes of any NFL coach, with Bills quarterbacks throwing more than 10 yards downfield only 6.4 times per game and more than 20 yards downfield only 2.9 times per game. (Small wonder Buffalo had the worst offensive performance in its history in 2005.) Culpepper's forte is the deep heave-ho. If Mularkey endlessly calls 5-yard outs, the Dolphins' offensive may sputter and Culpepper could become unhappy.

As Culpepper was heading from Minnesota to Miami, front office dude Rick Spielman crossed him going in the opposite direction. Bottom line on the cycle of trades Spielman initiated in 2004 for the Marine Mammals? Miami gave a second-round draft choice and Adewale Ogunleye, a young Pro Bowl-caliber player, for journeyman Marty Booker and Cleo Lemon, who has never played a down.

(The third-round choice Miami obtained in the Ogunleye deal is canceled out by the third-rounder the Dolphins traded for Lamar Gordon, already waived.) This raises the question of how Miami looks good going into this season when its recent trading and drafting has been suspect. In the last dozen years, the Dolphins have blown first-round picks on Billy Milner, Yatil Green, John Avery and Jamar Fletcher, while surrendering two first-round choices for the exiled-to-Canada Ricky Williams. You must go back to 1992 and Troy Vincent for a Miami first-round pick who was an unqualified success.

### **New England**

Three Super Bowl rings and a divisional appearance in the last five years, despite a never-ending procession of who-dats and low-drafted rookies in key positions. The world wonders what Belichick's secret is. Maybe it's this: New England just never has a play where someone is standing around doing nothing. Everybody watches the ball area in game tape. Watch NFL film away from the ball, and you'll be astounded how often there is at least one player who stands like a piece of topiary doing nothing. Offensive linemen are the worst offenders -- it's simply stunning how often these gentlemen, professionals and millionaires all, simply push the person in front of them once, then stand there watching the play unfold. But receivers, defensive linemen and lots of others are guilty of taking plays off, usually when they think the action is moving away from them. (Emphasis on *they think*.) I don't have stats to back this, but I suspect there is a direct relationship between winning in the NFL and 11 guys always working. Losing teams are more likely to have players who shove someone once, then stand around watching; winning teams don't tolerate this. Review Flying Elvii film from any Belichick game. You just never see a guy standing there doing nothing. Look at Bills, Cards, Lions, Raiders, Rams film -- there's so much standing around you wonder where the barista is. Belichick has impressed on his charges the high school maxim "play to the whistle," and this might be an unnoticed secret of his success.

Or maybe it's the Pats' incredible luck with not being sent on West Coast trips. Some analysts maintain that East Coast and West Coast teams flying to the opposite coast do about the same in opposite-coast games as they do in road dates overall. Nonetheless, players hate to fly opposite-coast, and such trips must have a wearying effect as the season progresses. Which team made the fewest three-time-zone trips in the last dozen years? The New England Patriots, who've been assigned just five in all that time. Surely this is a factor in their dynasty. Who's made the most opposite-coast trips in the same period? The Arizona Cardinals, with 46 three-time-zone journeys. Surely this is a factor in the Cactus Wrens' losing ways.

Last season New England quietly finished 31st in passing defense -- the first year during their winning run in which the Patriots have simply failed in any major aspect of the game. Yet New England won seven of its final nine, discounting the regular-season finale in which it rested its starters, and for the most part the Pats outplayed Denver in their playoff loss, Tom Brady's only bad game in memory. The Patriots remain one of the teams to beat.

**Pats note No. 1:** In last year's regular-season finale, understudy quarterback Matt Cassel threw two touchdown passes -- two more than he had thrown *in the previous six years*. Cassel never actually played in college; he backed up Carson Palmer and then Matt Leinart at USC. Before that, Cassel's most recent touchdown pass came in 1999, at Chatsworth High School in California. Yet he enters this season as the stand-in to Tom Brady. And this being New England, something tells you that if Cassel has to play, he'll look like a polished veteran.

**Pats note No. 2:** New England has two recent first-round draft choices at tight end, yet chose tight ends in the third and fourth rounds.

## **Oakland**

Last season this team was picked by many touts to go deep into the playoffs but instead finished 4-12, honking seven of its final eight. The Raiders were 21st in offense, 29th in defense; basically they did nothing well. And the idea that opponents are intimidated about having to play at the Coliseum -- which never made all that much sense; are opponents supposed to be afraid because Raider Nation guys in the crowd are wearing tinfoil? -- surely had no bearing in 2005. When the Broncos punched out the Long Johns 22-3 in Oakland, all pretense of Raiders mystique was finished.

Al Davis' arrow is up right now because everyone respects what he did to help prevent an owners-union meltdown in March. Otherwise, his meddling seems to link to the Raiders' decline. Since Tom Flores left in 1987, the Raiders have suffered constant coaching turmoil. First Davis fired Mike Shanahan, who seems to have turned out all right. Then Art Shell was shown the door despite a winning record and an AFC championship appearance. Then Mike White and Joe Bugel were cashiered after just two seasons and one season, respectively. Jon Gruden was a success, but he was so anxious to get out from under Davis that he engineered his own trade to Tampa. Then Bill Callahan and Norv Turner got quick hooks. Now Shell is back, after Davis practically needed to hire a headhunter to find anyone willing to accept the post. *Ay caramba.*

This year the Raiders passed on California golden boy Matt Leinart in the draft in order to hand the quarterback position to free-agent signee Aaron Brooks. Brooks had five full years as a starter in New Orleans, a much better shot than most struggling quarterbacks get, and Saints management even traded away Jake Delhomme so Brooks wouldn't feel threatened. Why should Brooks suddenly become a better player with the Raiders? Two untested backups wait behind Brooks. Expect at least one of them to be tested.

**Raiders' note No 1:** Randy Moss' cap number for 2007 will be about \$12 million, 11 percent of the \$109 million salary cap next year. Unless Moss has a great season in 2006, the Raiders are unlikely to devote that much of their cap to a player who isn't a quarterback. And if Moss doesn't have a great season, he may draw only lukewarm interest if Oakland waives him next winter for cap reasons. The mighty haven't exactly fallen in Moss' case, but he's teetering.

**Raiders' note No. 2:** Many readers have pointed out that TMQ was wrong to laud the Patriots for having the NFL's first Chinese-language official Web site. Oakland was first -- here is the [Raiders' Chinese-language site](#). Plus the Raiders' front office has two women whose portfolio is "multicultural initiatives."

## **Pittsburgh**

Pittsburgh, which won four consecutive non-home playoff games to take the Super Bowl, also has the NFL's best road record in the last decade at 44-36 -- an indicator of NFL home-field dominance. Twenty-five of 32 NFL teams have losing road records over the last decade. The Steelers' ability to win away from home not only stands out in the stats but also was essential to Pittsburgh's Super Bowl championship.

Usually this column has the least to say in the preseason about the defending champion, and Pittsburgh of 2006 is no exception. Obviously the Steelers are a terrific team. They don't have any clear fault, though their weakside linebackers are sometimes slow to redirect the tight end on second-and-long drag routes. Sorry -- that was an attempt to sound like I know what I'm talking about.

**Pittsburgh note No. 1:** The Steelers have had just two coaches in the past 37 years: Chuck Noll and Bill Cowher. That's unprecedented stability by the standards of NFL coach-a-rama.

**Pittsburgh note No. 2:** The Steelers train at Saint Vincent College, where the football program has a [249-word mission statement](#). Saint Vincent College is located in Latrobe, Pa. -- which until a few weeks ago was home of the brewery for renowned Rolling Rock beer. Anheuser-Busch just purchased the Rolling Rock brand and shifted production to the company's sprawling Budweiser brewery in Newark, N.J.

**Pittsburgh note No. 3:** Ben Roethlisberger is 27-4 as a starter in the NFL, his four losses to teams that made the playoffs that season. Stretching back to college, Roethlisberger is on a 40-4 run. Um, that's adequate.

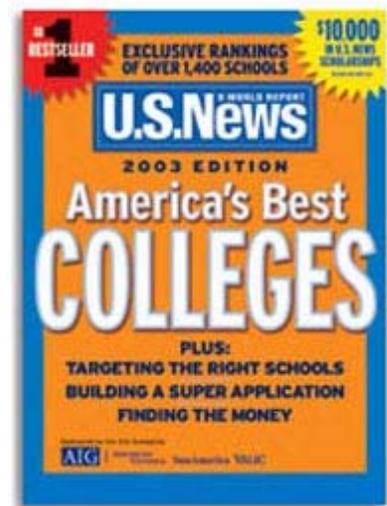


Latrobe will miss Rolling Rock.

**Disclaimer Watch:** Try ordering the hip America's Best Colleges Guidebook from U.S. News. Before the magazine will allow you to complete this \$10.95 purchase, you must click "accept" to a 2,912-word disclaimer. Among other things the disclaimer cautions, "U.S. News does not warrant or make any representations regarding the use or the results of the use of the materials at the Web site in terms of their correctness, accuracy, timeliness, reliability or otherwise."

### San Diego

The Chargers finished seventh in attendance in 2005, a stout achievement for one of the NFL's few franchises that often has seats for sale on game day. The last two years have been excellent at the turnstile, and a principal reason was the strong quarterback play of Drew Brees. Yet in the offseason, Bolts management unceremoniously showed Brees the door, making a bummer 2006 a strong possibility. Even if Philip Rivers becomes a solid quarterback, the odds are against him playing well in his first season.



Who reads disclaimers, right? Maybe we should.

What happened to Brees (and, by extension, to San Diego fans)? Bureaucratic politics. Brees was drafted in 2001 by the late San Diego general manager John Butler. When Butler died in 2003, Brees lost his management-suite champion. A.J. Smith took over the front office and used the first pick of the next draft on Eli Manning, who was traded for Rivers (the fourth pick). In doing so, Smith effectively declared the previous management's guy a failure and his guy the solution. But Brees trained like mad during the 2004 offseason while Rivers held out; Brees won the starting job, led the Chargers to the playoffs and made the Pro Bowl. Most general managers would be happy if their team reached the playoffs and their quarterback got a free ticket to Honolulu. Not Smith, who reportedly fumed that the Not Invented Here guy became the star while his own choice ran the scout team.

In 2005, San Diego was bitterly disappointed to miss the playoffs, though the Chargers had a rough schedule, finished with a winning record and Brees played only one bad game: the Christmas Eve wheeze-out at Kansas City, during which everybody on the Chargers' roster performed poorly. Brees capped the season by getting hurt in a meaningless finale. Smith seized on the injury as the pretext to send Brees packing, making no bona fide effort to re-sign him, nor tagging Brees to

insure San Diego could match any offer. Sports pundits evinced bafflement that Smith would behave as if he were eager to let a young Pro Bowl quarterback go. Yet Smith was eager to do exactly that -- he wanted Brees off the team in the worst way. Sure, the San Diego general manager would have liked draft choices in return. But Smith did not wish to take any chance, via a bona fide contract offer or by tagging, that Brees would don powder blue in 2006.

Brees gone, Marty Schottenheimer turns to Rivers. If the Bolts falter, Smith will blame Schottenheimer for playing Brees in the meaningless 2005 finale and exposing him to injury. If Rivers succeeds, Smith will crow that it was his personal super-brilliant genius that put the right guy at quarterback. Wait -- Smith is already crowing this. "Smith has been masterful on draft day," the [Chargers' Web site declares](#), citing Smith's deal to acquire Rivers. Don't you get the feeling Smith wrote this sentence about himself? If the goal of the San Diego front office was to win the maximum number of games in 2006, giving the boot to Brees was crazy. If the goal of the front office was to indulge Smith, everything that happened makes perfect sense.

**Bolts note:** The misnamed Charger Girls -- they're women -- are pressing for a place among the league's elite. [Auditions for this year's squad](#) were held at the [Jenny Craig Pavilion](#) at the University of San Diego. For sheer allure, it's hard to top [Chargers cheerleader Casie](#).

### Tennessee

This is Year 3 of the Tennessee cap crash. The Flaming Thumbtacks made the Super Bowl after the 1999 season, missed victory by a yard, and seemed poised for more Lombardi Trophy tries. Indeed, the Titans reached the playoffs three of the next four seasons. But a deal was made with the devil -- Tennessee management awarded bonus money like crazy to keep the core players of the Super Bowl run together. It made sense; Tennessee had a Super Bowl-quality roster, why not keep the group intact as long as possible? Inevitably the cap crash came. For three consecutive offseasons it was waivers-city as the Titans let go numerous stars to clear their salary cap, and loss after loss ensued. Now the team the Titans will field in 2006 has nothing to do with the Super Bowl group, other than its high school-inspired uniforms. Take a look-see at [Tennessee's depth chart](#) and try to guess which is the sole gent who started for the Titans their Super Bowl season. Hint: it's Brad Hopkins.



Casie's surely captured a few hearts in her day.

Finally the club's finances are back in order. This offseason the Flaming Thumbtacks were able to open the checkbook and sign quality players such as David Givens and David Thornton, whom TMQ views as one of the NFL's least-noted performers. (As a matter of policy this column does not use the word "underrated.") Jerome Solomon of the Boston Globe has pointed out that the \$8 million ex-Patriot Givens will earn this season at Tennessee is double the total New England paid to its entire receiving corps in 2005. It's been a while since the Titans could be described as big spenders.

Tuesday Morning Quarterback continues to admire coach Jeff Fisher. First, his 13-year tenure, second-longest in the NFL (behind Cowher), is remarkable in an age when coaches are viewed as corporate day laborers. Second, Tennessee is widely viewed as one of the best places in the league for a coach or player to land, partly owing to the normalcy Fisher projects on the team's operations. Normalcy is weird in modern pro football. Finally through the last two years of cap-induced losses -

- 9-23 following five seasons in the limelight -- Fisher hasn't panicked, cried, thrown a tantrum or issued a list of nonnegotiable demands. Not panicking is also weird in modern pro football.

**Reader Animadversion:** Got a complaint or a deeply held grievance? Write me at [TMQ\\_ESPN@yahoo.com](mailto:TMQ_ESPN@yahoo.com). Include your real name and the name of your hometown, and I may quote you by name unless you instruct me otherwise. Note: giving your hometown improves your odds of being quoted.

**Next Week:** Tuesday Morning Quarterback considers basketball roughly 1 percent as interesting as football. So next week's column will devote 1 percent of my annual space to basketball issues. Plus some football stuff -- you can squeeze a lot into 9,000 words.

**Monday, August 21, 2006**

**Updated: August 25, 10:14 AM ET**

TMQ hoops it up

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By Gregg Easterbrook

[Last week's TMQ](#) noted that NFL offensive philosophies, once distinctly different, have converged to the point that most teams use the same mish-mash of formations and tactics. This week we ask why all NFL defensive philosophies have not converged to the same tactics -- namely to the Tampa 2 defense, perfected by Tony Dungy. Last season, four clubs used the Tampa 2: Tampa, Chicago, Indianapolis and St. Louis. They finished first, second, 11th and 30th in fewest yards allowed, and that No. 11 finish for the Colts happened though Indianapolis was often way ahead and playing reserves on defense in the fourth quarter. Yet the Tampa 2 is still relatively rare in the NFL.

What's the essence of the Tampa 2? Both safeties usually play a deep zone against passes; all four defensive linemen try to disrupt rather than "fill gaps;" the linebackers need to be speed players. There's more to it, of course, but those are the basics. Almost every team sometimes uses tactics that would fit a Tampa 2, especially having both safeties deep. That's Cover 2, which some football announcers speak of in mystical tones, but simply means the safeties are playing a deep zone. (In most teams' nomenclature, Cover 1 means only one safety is back deep and Cover Zero, a rare tactic, means a double safety blitz.) But few NFL defenses have linemen disrupting at the expense of guarding gaps; most defensive philosophies emphasize that the defensive tackles, especially, dig in to prevent anyone from coming through their areas. And most NFL defenses seek linebackers with size, whereas the archetype of the Tampa 2 linebacker is Derrick Brooks, relatively small at 6-foot and 235 pounds, but wicked fast.

Why don't more teams go Tampa 2? Probably the main reason is that the defense requires really good players. Few NFL linebackers and defensive tackles are ideally suited to this scheme. A team with average defensive talent should expect an average result using a conventional 3-4 or 4-3, whereas average defensive talent would be likely to produce a below-average result using a Tampa 2. Basically, that's what happened with the Rams last season -- and note that new St. Louis defensive coordinator Jim Haslett is switching to a new scheme. But if a team has top-flight defensive personnel, as Tampa, Chicago and Indianapolis did last season, the Tampa 2 is the cat's meow.

In other football news, [three weeks ago TMQ](#) had an item on a Connecticut high school coach named Jack Cochran who was so antagonistic about running up scores, the state athletic association threatened to suspend him. Cochran's New London High won four games in 2005 by more than 50 points, once winning 90-0. And New London wasn't an unstoppable state champion -- rather, just a team that relentlessly ran up the score against weak opponents. "Running up the score," the column said, "is bully behavior, while the desire to destroy lesser opponents is a sign of poor character. Coaches who practice bad sportsmanship and teach bully behavior aren't doing their schools or their athletes any favors." As pointed out by dozens of readers, including Stew Dunsmore of Groton, Conn., last week [Cochran was arrested](#) for allegedly punching the coach of a rival high school, and has resigned his coaching position. Did Cochran punch a rival? That's for the legal system to determine. But the association between running up the score and bully behavior has never been more clear.

Running up the score is a big problem in high school football, somewhat of a problem in college football and rare in the pros, which itself suggests that the more sophisticated the coach, the less likely to run up the score. Coaches who run up the score on a regular basis have character problems, their ideal being not sportsmanship but standing over a humiliated opponent and laughing. Coaches who play to humiliate others make their high schools or colleges look bad: New London High has gotten nothing but bad press from its displays of poor sportsmanship last season. More importantly, such priorities harm the education of students. Teaching young athletes to taunt and gloat places into their minds concepts that will hold them back in life, or spoil whatever success they achieve. (If you've got to win by 50 to be happy, you will never be happy.) Teaching good-natured sportsmanship places into the young athlete's personality a positive trait that will serve him or her well in far more than athletics.

Consider two possible sports events: One is a hard, well-played game against an equal opponent, in which you win by a single point and then embrace your opponent on the field and call him brother. The other is an easy blowout win, after which you stand along the sideline mocking the defeated as they slink off. The former is not only more impressive in sports terms and more satisfying for the victor, it's a constructive life lesson. The latter is the inculcation of bully behavior, and few bullies go far in life. We live in a society in which cooperative ability, tolerance of others and interpersonal skills grow steadily more important. Well-run athletic programs can teach these values, while bullying athletic programs actively harm students. It is time high school principals and college presidents pay attention to coaching behavior and sportsmanship as aspects of education.

In other sports news, Tuesday Morning Quarterback considers basketball roughly 1 percent as interesting as football. And so each year, in the doldrums of August, TMQ devotes one percent of the column's annual line length to roundball issues. This is an "up" year to talk basketball -- the NCAA men's and women's tournaments were both exciting as always, and in a shocking reversal, the NBA was pretty good too, especially the fantastic Dallas-San Antonio playoff series. TMQ had feared the NBA was locked in a cycle of doom caused by high school draftees, guaranteed contracts and me-first mania among players. Now I think there's a chance, at least, the NBA can be saved.

In other Tuesday Morning Quarterback news, reader comments will run as a separate column on Wednesdays, beginning tomorrow.

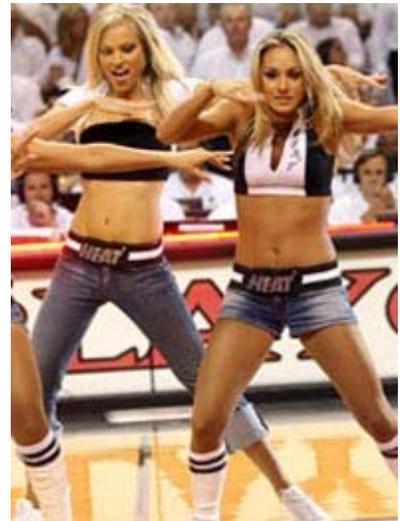
**This Year's Big Basketball Complaint:** OK, so traveling is legal in the NBA -- take as many steps as you want so long as you score. A player would have to carry the ball out of the arena, hail a cab, show his passport and board an airplane bound for Sweden to get called for "traveling" in today's NBA. In the second game of the Mavs-Suns playoff series, Dirk Nowitzki scored the key late basket. Nowitzki drove the baseline, then took SIX STEPS without dribbling before launching the deciding shot. No whistle. Traveling is now legal: Please, NBA, just make it official.

But something worse than runaway traveling has recently evolved: the "hop through." On a hop-through, the player drives the lane, jumps into the air, comes down and stops for an instant, then takes more steps and launches a shot. It's both traveling and up-and-down (which is a form of traveling) on the same play, and officials aren't calling it either. Against the Suns in the playoffs, Josh Howard of Dallas did so many hop-throughs he practically sprouted cute fuzzy rabbit ears. In the Dallas-San Antonio series, the Spurs made the incredible blunder of actually observing the rules, while Jerry Stackhouse repeatedly used the hop-through without being whistled. In the NBA Finals, Dwyane Wade used the hop-through so often the organist should have played "Here Comes Peter Cottontail" when Wade started down the lane. At one point in the Finals, Shaq drove the lane and stopped dribbling, then took steps, then jumped and came back down, then took more steps and jumped on his shot. No whistle.

Nobody hops like LeBron James, and his success is one reason other players are imitating the move. Watch tape of any James performance; half a dozen of his shots per game come at the end of a hopping move on which he has both traveled and committed an up-and-down violation. TMQ attended a Cavs-Whizzlies playoff contest this spring, and was struck by two things about James. First, he almost always took possession of the ball outside the opponent's three-point arc. Michael Jordan came off picks and caught the ball close to the basket. James can't come off picks because Cleveland does not run picks, or any other kind of play -- James just stands outside the arc and someone hands him the ball, then he goes one-on-one. The second thing that struck me about James' performance was the sheer number of times he went down the lane, traveled, jumped into the air, came back down, then jumped again without being called for anything.

NBA offensive basketball continues to be ugly -- the Suns and Mavs were such joys this year because they were pretty to watch. If players are allowed to barrel down the lane out of control, traveling and committing up-and-downs and not being whistled, why should they take sensible shots or cooperate to set picks to get teammates open? Why not just barrel down the lane out of control and then heave the ball in the general direction of the basket? That players even call the new move the hop-through -- James coined the term -- tells you they know what they're doing isn't legal. But they will keep doing it until the officials enforce the rules. And the game will become more artistic when that happens.

**Tragically Misplaced Network Priorities No. 1:** The extremely aesthetically appealing Miami Heat Dancers danced in next to nothing during home games of the NBA Finals, their allure an indicator of a power shift -- the best-looking beach babes now congregate in south Florida, not California. But ABC aired only fleeting glimpses of the Heat Dancers. Today, prime-time television shows of all the major networks revel in graphic depictions of crime and violence, obsess about sex and glamorize infidelity, celebrating the tawdry and the vulgar. Yet when fit, athletic, beautiful women are dancing in public -- and *want to be looked at* -- this makes the networks get shy and turn the cameras away. Janine Thompson, the Heat Dancers' director, runs basketball's hottest dance squad; in this case the league champion and the league's best dancers come from the same franchise. Thompson has achieved the cheerleader trifecta: Her charges are glamorous, barely wear clothing and put on an impressive performance of complex hip-hop dance, rather than just jumping around. Television might not show you the Heat Dancers, [but TMQ will](#).



Needed: South Florida update on the Beach Boys' song "California Girls."

**First Amendment Purists Rally Behind Bryant Gumbel's Right to Be Wrong:** You know it must be August since so many are taking in such seriousness that Bryant Gumbel of the NFL Network said NFL commissioner Paul Tagliabue should show his replacement, Roger Goodell, "where he keeps Gene Upshaw's leash," because "the docile head of the players' union" has become the commissioner's "personal pet." Hey everyone -- this was not a speech to the United Nations General Assembly, this was a comment about football on HBO. At the end of the summer there are always "August scandals," mini-controversies that become conflated because celebrities and politicians are on vacation and not producing gaffes at the normal rate. Gumbel's Grumble is an example of the August scandal, and was obviously the sort of opinionated speech that needs protection.

As to the substance of Gumbel's claim, he's way off. Tagliabue shot back that Gumbel was "uninformed," and that's exactly the right word. Baseball long-term has had the most confrontational labor relations of the major sports, so let's compare MLB player pay with NFL player pay since the onset of the NFL salary cap in 1994. Adjusting for inflation, the average pro baseball player's pay has risen 71 percent since 1994, while the average pro football player's pay has risen 132 percent. NFL player pay increases have dwarfed all other team sports, which hardly sounds like the union is on a leash. More, there's been no interruption of pay in the NFL, while there have been those unfortunate months in baseball and a full year in the NHL during which players received nothing at all. Gumbel further complained that the NFL Players Association has not won its members fully guaranteed contracts. This is true -- but the lack of fully guaranteed contracts is a reason football pay is rising so fast! Guaranteed contracts in the NBA have been a disaster for quality of play, since players can defy coaches, perform poorly and still receive full pay. If fully guaranteed contracts came to the NFL, the first few years would be golden for players. But then quality of play would decline, ratings would decline and raises would decline.

A running question about labor unions is whether they should make a theatrical show of confronting owners, or quietly work for the best possible deal for members. Manhattan media types tend to like theatrical confrontation, because it provides good broadcasting material. Quietly obtaining the best possible deal is what is in the members' interest, and at this the NFL Players Association excels.

**NBA Prescription: More College, Less Influence for Shoe Companies:** Pro basketball is in an "up" cycle partly because the new collective bargaining agreement forbids high school players from jumping directly to the NBA. The drafting of high school players was an unmitigated disaster for pro basketball -- it's no coincidence the league's decline in television ratings coincided with the arrival of high school kids. The high schoolers have immature games that drag down the quality of the sport: And never forget, quality is the essential feature of all products. With a few exceptions, the only style of play a high school kid knows is hey-look-at-me. Selfish basketball is far less entertaining than the ensemble version -- just consider the difference between last season's Phoenix Suns and New York Knicks.

Plus, by jumping directly to the NBA, 18-year-old prospects fail to go to college and become well-known players about whom fans would be excited. It's this second point that seems haunting, because it means the NBA has spent the past decade depriving itself of stars who might otherwise have come into existence. Yes, LeBron James was terrific in the NBA right out of high school. But James also would have been great coming out of college. The players who have made the high-school-to-NBA transition successfully (Kobe Bryant, Kevin Garnett, a few others) always were bound to become stars. It's the players who did not become stars, because they jumped too young, the NBA has cheated itself of.

Think about Kwame Brown, the high-schooler taken first overall in the 2001 NBA draft. Gifted with incredible physical talent, Brown is an embarrassing underachiever -- plus his personality appears stuck at his 17th birthday, lending him no marketing appeal. Now imagine an alternate path for the same young man. Instead of jumping directly from high school to the NBA, he goes to Kentucky or UCLA or any good basketball college. His game improves, he learns on-court concepts other than brooding selfishness, and off-court he matures in his ability to handle the world. Kwame Brown becomes a nationally known college star. When he's drafted first overall into the NBA, fans are excited. By now, people like me would be saying to my kids, "Wow, Kwame Brown is coming to town, let's get tickets and go see him!" Instead not one person has ever said, "Let's get some NBA tickets to see Kwame Brown," and it seems likely no one ever will.

This squandering of potential NBA stars is especially maddening because the pushing of too-young players into the NBA has been driven foremost by shoe companies. Somehow Nike and Reebok got it into their heads that teen sneaker buyers would identify more with 18-year-old unpolished NBA players enjoying instant wealth more than they would with mid-20s high-quality NBA players. I don't know how this idea arose, since by far the most successful sneaker endorser, Jordan, did not realize his marketing success until he was a mature player in his mid-20s. Perhaps thrusting high school players into the NBA maximized income for Nike and Reebok. But it was a disaster for NBA product quality, and hence hurt ratings.

Now the new league-union agreement mandates draftees be at least 19, a rule intended to require at least one year of college. And you'd hope that even gifted, NBA-bound athletes, after experiencing college for a year, might think, "This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to get an education, maybe I should stick around." You'd also think the shoe companies would be aligning themselves with education over ignorance. Apparently you'd think wrong. [According to this New York Times story](#) by Pete Thamel and Thayer Evans, a shoe company consultant has been making the rounds, suggesting to some teenage future NBA prospects that they skip the minimum year of college and play in Europe, then file for the NBA draft. To avoid the horror, the horror, of having to sit in class and think!

The Times didn't connect the dots on this, so allow me. Dot 1: Most players being encouraged not to attend college are African-American. If athletic shoe companies believe African-American males are incapable of handling college coursework, they should state this for the record. Dot 2: Shallowness is a core problem of big-deal athletics. The NBA, NFL and MLB create celebrity athletes looked up to by the young. A few do become role models for an informed, intelligent approach to life -- think Tiki Barber. But most celebrity athletes couldn't tell you what Ernest Hemingway wrote, or what just happened in the Mexican presidential election, if their lives depended on it. Now the NBA is taking the high road, urging its prospects back toward the educational system. The shoe companies are resisting, while street-hustler types have been steering promising basketball prospects to storefront diploma-mill "schools" that make no attempt to teach -- [see the Thamel-Evans article on that](#). In their 2000 book "The Shape of the River," William Bowen and Derek Bok showed that in recent decades African-American career women have closed most of their degrees-earned and income gaps with white career women, while African-American males have made less progress compared to white males. One factor might be that many young black men look up to ill-educated athletes and pop stars, while young black women have role models such as Oprah Winfrey, who constantly emphasizes books and learning. Both the NBA and NCAA need to do far more to educate basketball prospects, if only for the role-model effect on young men. And while we're on this, thanks to Thamel, Evans and their editors for fighting the cultural assumption that it's OK for star athletes to be functional illiterates.

NBA commissioner David Stern is aware of the problems described in the above paragraphs. Recently he said it was wrong that college recruiters are highly restricted in their ability to talk to high school basketball prospects about attending college, but "street runners or shoe representatives" can promise tall teenagers the moon. For Stern to criticize the shoe companies is gutsy, given their business relationship with the league. Perhaps the commissioner has realized shoe firms and pro basketball have divergent interests. Shoe firms might do fine financially by glamorizing minimally-educated prodigy athletes, while the NBA needs to develop quality players and protect its image, lest the league become perceived as an opponent of learning. Stern is floating the idea of the NBA establishing a basketball academy for the top few hundred teen prospects in the United States -- essentially a private high school that would emphasize basketball, but enforce real

classroom and graduation standards. This would be preferable to the current system, which actively discourages NBA-bound young men from seeking educations.

**Given This, It's Amazing 100 percent of NCAA Basketball Players Didn't Get a 1600 on Their SATs:** Another basketball-and-education problem is the incredible laxity of NCAA enforcement of high-school graduation and admissions-test minimums. Consider these passages from a recent Washington Post story by Mark Schlabach -- now with ESPN.com -- about Omar Williams, a starter on George Washington University's NCAA men's tournament team:

"Williams was accepted at George Washington after failing to graduate in five years from his original high school and receiving no grades at three prep schools in the next two years, including one that burned down after he was there five days. The National Collegiate Athletic Association certified his transcript without any verification, making him academically qualified for a basketball scholarship. ... The NCAA's eligibility certification process is handled by a private company it created, Clearinghouse, which approves high school courses and transcripts of recruits. Under Clearinghouse policy, there was no requirement to check if any of the schools on Williams's transcript existed, if the grades were real or if he attended the schools, said Kevin Lennon, an NCAA official. The SAT scores of applicants, critical for certification, are allowed to be submitted in handwriting, instead of on an Educational Testing Service document. Those scores are not compared to official results, Lennon said."

Is there any accredited college or university in the United States that would admit a regular academic student based on a handwritten test score, rather than a form supplied by the testing agency? Yet the NCAA allows you to play Division I basketball if you simply make up a score. It's an intelligence test of sorts -- a test to realize if you can spot obvious NCAA loopholes.

**Aging Dictator Item No. 1:** Henry the Fifth, victor at the battle of Agincourt, died of dysentery in 1422 at age 34. A short time before his death he had married Catherine of Valois, daughter of the king of France, and signed the Treaty of Troyes, which would have ended the Hundred Years War by making Henry regent over France. Had Henry become ruler of France, the history of Europe might have unfolded very differently. Instead, Henry died young. Following his demise, Joan of Arc inspired France to expel the English, thus preventing the union of the nations.

Why do I mention this? This is Tuesday Morning Quarterback -- I don't have to have a reason. But it bears on the "biological solution" the United States has been pursuing regarding Fidel Castro. In olden days, when lifespans were short, simply waiting for a leader to die was often an effective strategy, because leaders rarely lived long in power. With modern longevity, waiting for a leader to die doesn't work. Castro is 80 years old and has been in power for 47 years. Kim Il-sung was dictator of North Korea for 46 years, until he died at age 82; if his son Kim Jong-il lives as long as his father, he will be dictator until 2023. As longevity continues to increase, dictators stay in power ever longer. Whole generations suffer while waiting for their dictators to expire.

**Aging Dictator Item No. 2:** If you're going to be a dictator, at least be colorful. That's how the New York Times remembered Alfredo Stroessner last week, headlining his obituary: General Alfredo Stroessner, Colorful Dictator, Dies in Exile. Oh those zany, wacky Paraguayan dictators!

### **Tragically Misplaced Network Priorities No. 2:**

During games played at the American Airlines Center, we barely saw [the Mavs Dancers](#), either. [Now check this](#), the audition application for aspiring Mavs Dancers. The form includes a waiver granting Dallas' billionaire owner, Mark Cuban, nearly unlimited license to use the dancer's image for any commercial purpose, yet says nothing about pay. Being a Mavs Dancer requires two to five rehearsals per week, plus game performances; also, prospective dancers [must take these classes](#) at their own expense. So what's the pay? Across professional sports, cheerleaders are unpaid or receive only token amounts such as \$50 per game, while the men at all levels of professional sports organizations are raking in money like crazy. There's a word for this: The word begins with "s," and it's not "sexy." Come on NBA and NFL owners, your leagues are multi-billion-dollar enterprises dependent on many kinds of public support and tax subsidies: Offer fair pay to the women who dance. Do this before some crafty lawyer files a pattern-of-discrimination suit that will cost you far more than simply paying cheerleaders fairly to begin with.



They're beautiful and scantily attired, but too wholesome to be on "Desperate Housewives."

### **I Don't Care Whether Pluto Is a Planet or a Pluton, And Don't See Why Anyone Else Cares:**

Last week the International Astronomical Union issued a 3,472-word fact sheet about its [epic struggle to define one single word](#), "planet." Check the tormented 124-word definition of the goofy neologism "pluton," verbosity that might have been boiled down to "any mostly round rock circling the sun beyond the orbit of Neptune." Check the tormented explanation of why the large satellites of Earth and Jupiter are just moons but Charon, the tiny satellite of Pluto, gets to be a pluton. The IAU says it took several committees two years to come up with the goofy word "pluton," and even that is not final -- the definition must be voted on at the [IAU General Assembly](#) now meeting in Prague.

Note the sessions at the IAU General Assembly -- one is ["Near Earth Objects, Our Celestial Neighbors."](#) Let's invite them in for tea! But don't you mean our celestial mortal enemies? While the definition of a planet, or agreement on the exact number of planets in the solar system, will never have the slightest bearing on anyone's life, that our world might be struck by a near-Earth object is a grave, pressing danger. About 10,000 years ago, something enormous crashed into the Argentine pampas, obliterating a significant chunk of the South American ecology with a force thought to be 18,000 times that of the Hiroshima bomb. In the year 535, multiple medium-sized meteorite impacts around the world caused a generation of crop failures and cruel winters that helped push Europe into its Dark Ages. In 1908, a meteorite or comet about 250 feet across hit Tunguska, Siberia, detonating with a force perhaps 700 times the power of the Hiroshima bomb. Had this strike occurred in Tokyo or Paris instead of the Arctic Circle, millions would have died.

Estimates hold that 500,000 rocks roughly the size of the Tunguska object drift in the region of Earth's orbit, along with perhaps 1,000 asteroids big enough to cause global devastation on the order of the comet strike that did in the dinosaurs. Yet [NASA is taking no action](#) to protect Earth against space objects, while astronomers debate how many plutons can dance on the head of a pin. Space-object impacts are statistically unlikely in any one person's lifetime, but that is no assurance one will not happen tomorrow. Rock and comet strikes have caused mass extinctions in Earth's past. A large impact today could kill vast numbers, while causing frigid winters, global acid rain as bad as battery acid, and crop failures that plunge humanity into famine. Astronomers ought to stop wasting time on wordplay and sternly warn the world that space agencies should be researching ways to prevent something big from falling on our heads from space. If NASA stopped an asteroid or comet strike this would be, well, the greatest achievement in human history.



John Tierney of the New York Times proposes calling this a "planetino."

**Goodnight, and Good Grief:** When Katie Couric sat last week for interviews with USA Today, the Los Angeles Times and the Associated Press, she was accompanied by not one but two public-relations officers -- and USA Today reported she followed their instructions, rather than the other way around. A holder of the chair of Edward R. Murrow who can't speak or handle an interview without corporate minders present?



Do you see a corporate publicist in this picture?

**Clang! Clang! Clang!:** At the NBA All-Star Game, Nate Robinson missed 20 of 22 attempts during the dunk contest -- which he *won*. In the game itself Ray Allen, Gilbert Arenas, Kobe Bryant, Dirk Nowitzki and Rasheed Wallace combined to shoot 0-for-21 from the 3-point line.

**Clang! Clang! Clang!:** New Orleans missed 22 of its final 23 shots in losing to the Los Angeles Clippers [89-67](#). The Hornets also missed every 3-point attempt they took during the game.

**Clang! Clang! Clang!:** For the second consecutive year, Allen Iverson joined the small, elite group of basketball players who have missed 1,000 shots in a season. In 2004-05, Iverson took an NBA-leading 1,818 shots and missed 1,047; in 2005-06, Iverson took 1,822 shots and missed 1,008. But Iverson is staring at the tail lights of Kobe Bryant, who this season heaved an NBA-leading 2,173 shots in the general direction of the basket, missing 1,195. Bryant came within shouting distance of one of the few sports records likely never to be broken, Wilt Chamberlain's 1,592 missed shots during the 1961-62 basketball campaign. But Chamberlain also made 1,597 field goals that season -- that is, he hit more often than he missed. Bryant missed 217 more times than he hit. Though Kobe led the league in scoring, his shooting percentage didn't even finish in the top 50.

**Dear NFL: Please Enact the NBA's Sunglasses Rule:** The NBA now has a dress code. [Here it is](#), along with Kevin Garnett looking classy in a pinstriped suit. Basically the dress code is business casual, and prohibits the wearing of sunglasses indoors.

**\$135 Million Buys You a Boeing 767 or One Year of New York Knicks Losses:** The New York Knickerbockers will have a payroll of around \$135 million in the 2006-07 NBA season,

approaching the Yankees' current \$194 million for highest payroll ever in team sports. The Knicks' 2006-07 payroll will be more than double the NBA's salary cap. (The NFL salary cap is a hard cap that can be fudged only in minor ways; the NBA salary cap is a soft cap that means nothing so long as a club is willing to pay penalties to the league, as the rolling-in-dough Knicks are.) And at \$135 million, the Knicks are likely to be a terrible team!

One reason the Knicks' player expenses are so high is the team's February 2006 acquisition of guard Steve Francis, who makes around \$15 million annually. The Orlando Magic traded Francis, a three-time All-Star performer but a player with a bad reputation, to New York for a benchwarmer you've never heard of and a player Orlando immediately waived. That is, Orlando sent Francis to New York solely to get his guaranteed contract off the team's books. The week before, Detroit traded Darko Milicic, not long ago the second pick in the NBA draft, to Orlando for reserve Kelvin Cato; the point of the trade was to get Milicic's guaranteed contract off Detroit's books. By contemporary NBA standards, you're much better off with nothing than with an expensive failure like Milicic or a selfish gunner like Francis. Fans might want to look at the [Knicks City Dancers](#) but certainly not at the Knicks.

**So Long Charlie:** You are forgiven if you've forgotten the name Charlie Ward. He's left basketball after 11 mostly invisible years in the NBA, with career averages of 6.3 points and 4 assists per game. What a fabulous quarterback Ward was in college -- winner of the 1993 Heisman Trophy, quarterback of Florida State's 1994 national championship win in the Orange Bowl. The basketball-football salary gap is so great, perhaps Ward made more money as a journeyman in the NBA than he could have made as a star in the NFL. As reader Chris Monjoy of Valencia, Calif. points out, the Denver Nuggets just signed the basketball oddity Nene, with career averages of 11 points and only 29 minutes per game, to a fully-guaranteed \$60 million contract, more than twice the guaranteed value of the deal signed by Mario Williams, first choice in the NFL draft. But I'll always regret we were deprived of seeing Ward run an NFL offense -- whereas seeing him run an NBA offense made me shrug.

**So Long Darko:** One ray of hope in the NBA is that the two overall best clubs of the new century, the Detroit Pistons and San Antonio Spurs, play team ball. Consistent success by Detroit and San Antonio proves that team ball trumps the NBA's main offensive style, which is four guys standing around watching while who's got the ball goes one-on-one. Now that Ben Wallace has left the Pistons, Detroit might falter. Think what a multi-year champion the Pistons might have had, had they not blown the second overall pick of the 2003 draft on Darko Milicic. The three players selected after Milicic were Carmelo Anthony, Chris Bosh and Dwyane Wade! Maybe we should blame ESPN The Magazine ("Published on Earth: The Planet") for the Milicic blunder -- it featured him on its June 2003 cover, shortly before Detroit made the fateful pick.



ESPN The Magazine looks like "Published on Pluto: The Pluton" to Pistons fans.

**He's Sure to Throw Another Pass At Some Point in His Career:** During the NBA Finals, at one point Hubie Brown said, "That was a beautiful pass by Antoine Walker." This constituted the first time the words "pass by Antoine Walker" had ever been uttered.

**This Year's Most Amusing Salary Cap Trades:** Minnesota traded Brandon Roy, whom the Wolves had taken with the sixth overall choice, for Randy Foye, drafted seventh. Wait a minute -- if

Foye was available when the Timberwolves drafted at No. 6, why didn't they just take him then? The trade dropped Foye down one slot in the NBA's rookie contract system. Going seventh rather than sixth meant Foye will earn about \$1.5 million less per season, freeing salary cap space for Minnesota to sign a veteran. For all intents and purposes, Minnesota traded the sixth choice in the draft for the seventh choice plus \$1.5 million in cap space. Philadelphia traded Lee Nailon and a 2006 second-round pick to the Cleveland Cavaliers for a conditional second-rounder -- that is, a choice the 76ers might never receive. Philadelphia was paying Cleveland a second-round pick to accept Nailon's salary. Meanwhile Phoenix sold the 27th selection of the NBA draft to Portland for cash. The Suns thought there was no one at 27th who could make their team, and wanted to avoid getting stuck paying a guaranteed contract for someone they'd waive.

**Tony Kornheiser, TMQ Demand Earlier Start Times:** Why have recent NBA Finals telecasts not begun until 9 p.m. ET? Yes, the West Coast doesn't get home from work until 9 p.m. ET. But the bulk of the American population lives east of the Mississippi; a 9 p.m. tip-off means the East Coast has gone to bed when the fourth quarter starts. Game 5 of this year's NBA Finals actually started at 9:16 p.m. ET and ended in swirling controversy at 12:33 a.m. the following day, with most of the East Coast already slumbering. Football games that start at 9 p.m. ET are bad enough -- note ESPN is moving up the start time of "Monday Night Football" this year to avoid games ending after midnight on the East Coast. At least in football, sometimes the first half is the best part. In basketball, the fourth quarter is usually the best part, and the late NBA Finals tip-offs mean much of the country does not see the best part. Plus, don't get me started on those Suns and Mavs' playoff games that didn't tip until 10:30 p.m. ET. The Suns and Mavs put on some of the NBA's most exciting ball this season, and unless you lived west of the Rockies, you missed it. The NFL plays night games in Arizona and Texas without them starting at 10:30 p.m. ET. Why can't the NBA do the same?

**Get Out a Magnifying Glass and Read the Fine Print on Your Home Warranty:** Until recently I considered myself a smart consumer. For years I have been paying premiums on a home warranty. Home warranties cover repair or replacement of appliances, furnaces, air conditioners and so on. At least, that's what they are supposed to do. The compressor in the central air of my house needed replacement. No problem -- I'd read the fine print in the contract, and failure of central air was specifically covered. The company sent a representative, and announced it would pay nothing because, the insurer said, my A/C had not been adequately maintained. Buried in microscopically small type was a clause saying all coverage was voided by inadequate maintenance. But the contract did not define adequate maintenance. So I asked on what grounds the company claimed inadequate maintenance, and here was the answer: "Our representative determines whether the maintenance was adequate." I've been kicking myself for not realizing, years ago, that the policy was a con -- akin to Groucho Marx's sham insurance company which promised, "If you lose a leg, we'll help you look for it." I can't be the only one this has happened to. If you've got a home warranty, read the maintenance clause. You might be paying for nothing.



He said: "This product comes with my personal guarantee -- if anything goes wrong, I don't know what you can do about it."

**A Made 2-Pointer Counts More Than a Missed 3; There Seems Some Confusion on This Point:** Tuesday Morning Quarterback has nothing against the 3-point shot -- it's a smart play when a good shooter takes one uncovered. On Final Four night in this year's NCAA men's tournament,

both winners, Florida and UCLA, attempted more treys than the losers. But there's the smart 3 taken by an open player, and the silly feed-my-ego 3. The latter, already an NBA mainstay, has been spreading into the college ranks.

When No. 1-ranked Connecticut was upset by unknown George Mason in the men's tournament, at halftime UConn led by nine. In the second half, Connecticut began to hoist up hey-look-at-me 3s, surrendering its inside power advantage. Through the second half and overtime Connecticut shot 2-for-13 from the 3-point line, versus 13-for-25 on regular attempts. Had Connecticut simply attempted nothing but 2-point shots in the second half against George Mason, the favorites likely would have prevailed. Meanwhile in the Elite Eight, favored Memphis lost to UCLA by five points as Memphis missed 15 consecutive 3-points attempts. Had all those ego-feeding 3s simply been 2-point tries, Memphis likely would have advanced to the Final Four. Too many 3s in college last season were taken for player-ego reasons.

**Reader Animadversion:** Got a complaint or a deeply held grievance? Write me at [TMQ\\_ESPN@yahoo.com](mailto:TMQ_ESPN@yahoo.com). Include your real name and the name of your hometown, and I may quote you by name unless you instruct me otherwise. Note: Giving your hometown improves your odds of being quoted.

**Monday, August 28, 2006**  
**Updated: August 29, 3:36 PM ET**  
TMQ's 7th Annual NFC Preview

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By Gregg Easterbrook

Ten of the league's 32 head coaches are new, prompting reader Chris Sypolt of Seattle to propose that all people wearing an NFL headphone hold the title *interim head coach*. As in, "*Interim head coach* Gary Kubiak of the Houston Texans said today ..."

Seven of the 10 new faces are coordinators becoming NFL head coaches for the first time: Brad Childress (Vikings), Scott Linehan (Rams), Eric Mangini (Jets), Rod Marinelli (Lions), Mike McCarthy (Packers), Sean Payton (Saints) and Kubiak. If the history of promoted coordinators holds, the majority of this group will be fired soon. After all, six of the seven new coordinators becoming first-time head coaches were hired to replace former coordinators who became first-time head coaches and then were fired.

Previous TMQs have detailed the marketing dynamic behind the cashier-o-rama that is the NFL coaching guild. Two-thirds of NFL clubs do not make the playoffs, meaning two-thirds of fan bases end the season hopping mad; since most ticket sales occur in the offseason, teams that missed the playoffs must do something each offseason to give customers a reason to believe next season will be better; firing the head coach is the easiest dramatic action an NFL owner can take.

In a nutty way, it is economically rational for NFL owners to give coaches a quick hook. But this begs the question: Why do owners who have just fired a coach for marketing reasons so often hire coordinators who have never been head coaches before? The reason is the supply of experienced NFL coaches is limited, while most big-college coaches do not want NFL jobs.

You might assume the typical football-factory college coach longs to ascend to the NFL. Most do not, and longevity is a prime reason. In the last 15 years, average annual turnover among NFL head coaches has been 20 percent, compared with less than 5 percent among Division I-A head coaches. Coaching tenure in the NFL is maybe three years; in Division I-A, more than a decade. At the NFL level, all clubs have similar talent (the talent differential between the Super Bowl winner and the league's worst team is just not that much), while 20 of 32 fail to make the postseason. At the Division I-A level, recruiting advantages mean the football factories possess a *huge* talent edge, while every last one of the top 32 teams heads to a bowl game. An orangutan could compile a winning record and become bowl-eligible at Ohio State, Florida State, Texas and many other football-factory colleges.

Not only are the teams stacked in big-college football, the schedules are stacked: National title contender West Virginia plays seven home dates and five road games this season, for example. The cupcake teams that allow themselves to be clobbered at football-factory stadia for money reasons -- West Virginia will host Division I-AA Eastern Washington -- have just shy of zero chance of winning, giving every big-college coach several annual guaranteed Ws.

In the NFL, by contrast, there are no pushover opponents: Even a cellar-dwelling NFL team is always a threat to beat an NFL division leader. Big-college coaching is a very sweet deal, plus coaches get treated like little gods, whereas at the NFL level the knives are always out. In recent years, only a handful of football-factory coaches have been willing to accept offers to work in the pros. NFL owners always say they aren't pursuing college coaches because college coaches might not transition well to the professional environment. But the more basic reason is that most big-

college coaches don't want NFL jobs. If you had a sure thing at a football factory, would you exchange it for a job with 20 percent annual turnover?

In other football news, it's late August -- which means there's not much time left for fans to pretend they believe their teams' annual summer promises. Here are three of the most annoying NFL summer clichés:

"This year we're really going to run the football." All teams claim this during training camp, though most will panic and go pass-wacky by the end of the first quarter in Week 1. Why do NFL coaches always seem apologetic about passing? Most analysts believe passing success ties more closely to victory than rushing numbers. Check the [past 20 Super Bowl winners](#). Only two -- the Ravens in 2001 and Giants in 1991 -- used run-focused game plans.

"We will play aggressive, attacking defense." Has any coach ever promised to a docile defense? Just once I'd like to hear an NFL coach say in August, "We're going to play a soft zone and drop back into coverage."

"We're going to take it one game at a time." There is no other way to take it.

And now Tuesday Morning Quarterback's NFC preview:

### **Arizona**

I've been flirting with making the same mistake every football pundit made last year at this time -- saying something nice about the Arizona Cardinals. Chain me to the mast before I surrender to the Sirens! Or preferably surrender to [the Cards' cheerleaders](#). A year ago, football experts from Merrill Hoge, Joe Theismann and Steve Young of ESPN to John Clayton and Len Pasquarelli of ESPN.com to Mark Maske of the Washington Post to Peter King and Michael Silver of Sports Illustrated to Clark Judge and Pete Prisco of CBS Sportsline, predicted the Cards would have a playoff season. Instead it was cover-your-eyes as usual for Arizona fans.

This summer many are pointing to the fact the Cactus Wrens were the sole club last year to finish in the Top 10 in both offense and defense, and wondering if this means things finally will come together in the desert. Yes, I actually considered joining the list of the gullible who have made favorable forecasts for the Cardinals. But then I checked the record books and noticed this team has two postseason victories in 86 years of existence. Plus, the Cards wear quite silly-looking high-school-inspired uniforms. I'll play the percentages and say Arizona will get under .500 yet again.

Counting sacks and scrambles, Arizona coaches called 757 passing plays last season and only 360 rushes, the 68 percent passing ratio making Arizona's the least balanced offense in the league. Yet even though the Cards passed so much, meaning defenses were expecting the pass, Arizona's rushing attack was still pitiful. The team finished last in average yards per rush at 3.2. If you've got the defense expecting pass and still have the least productive rushing game in the NFL, that is not very good.

The Cards' impressive new rolling-field stadium has opened, and initial reviews are very favorable. But why isn't this facility named Pat Tillman Field? You get the creepy feeling the NFL has backed off from Tillman's memory now that we know [he was killed by friendly fire](#), rather than charging up a hill, and now that the Army, which lied about how Tillman died, seems to want to pretend Tillman never existed. But the sad circumstances of Tillman's death do not in any way detract from his patriotism. And remember Tillman died in Afghanistan, not Iraq. Whatever the morals of the Iraq war might be, our presence in Afghanistan is clearly justified as self-defense; on the day of his death Tillman was an honorable soldier fighting on the side of right. Come on Arizona, name the place Pat Tillman Field.

Not only is the new stadium impressive, the seats are sold! All Arizona home games for 2006 are sellouts; this will be the first season since the Cards came to Arizona in 1988 that all games will be shown on local television. (To top it off, while most NFL facilities charge you \$20 to get out of your car, at Arizona parking is [free for season-ticket holders](#).) Excitement over the new stadium and the arrivals of Matt Leinart and Edgerrin James probably drove sales. Or maybe it was Paris Hilton strutting at Matt Leinart's post-draft celebration at Caesar's Palace in Las Vegas. Surely, Leinart was the first person ever to celebrate after being drafted by the Cardinals. According to Paola Boivin of the Arizona Republic, Hilton "danced seductively" at the party while "an all-girl band wearing black bras and leather boots swung from the ceiling on red feather boas." Feather boas can support the human body?



She gets \$50,000 for attending your party and \$100,000 for not attending.

TMQ continues to not understand why Paris Hilton is considered a beauty. I'd take any fit, athletic, alluring member of the Arizona cheer-babe squad over Hilton any day of the week. Here's [Kayla of the Cardinals' cheerleaders](#), an elementary school teacher. I suppose I should just give up wondering why no teacher I ever had looked remotely like this.

### Atlanta

At this point, the Falcons' faithful must accept that Michael-Mike Vick is an average quarterback and unlikely ever to be more. His Pro Bowl invitations stem from publicity, not performance. Vick has thrown just 51 touchdown passes in 51 career starts. Last season, he finished 25th among NFL quarterbacks in passer rating, trailing Josh McCown.

Vick's running ability is impressive: The Falcons led the league in rushing last season both because Vick gained ground and because defenses were so focused on stopping Vick's rushes, they allowed Warrick Dunn to run for 1,416 yards. You'd figure a team that leads the league in rushing and has a Pro Bowl quarterback would finish better than 8-8. But Vick is a Pro Bowl QB strictly on paper. On the field, he's average, and while to be an average NFL QB is an accomplishment -- lots of highly drafted, highly paid gentlemen wish they could say they became average NFL QBs -- there now seems little reason to believe Vick carries any chance of greatness.

Executive Vice President-Head Coach Jim Mora -- that's his title! -- seriously mismanaged the end of Atlanta's 2005 season. Going into the Falcons' 15th game, Atlanta was in the rare situation in which a tie would have kept the team's playoff hopes alive. Mora did not know this. Atlanta took possession on its own 16 with two minutes remaining in overtime. Rather than run into the line three times and drill the clock to cause a tie, Falcons' coaches called three consecutive passes; two clanged to the ground incomplete, Atlanta punted and City of Tampa had enough seconds to get into position to kick the winning field goal as time expired. That Atlanta entered this game unaware of the playoff permutations was inexcusable. Each week in December the NFL devises a playoff permutations grid that allows teams to calculate the consequences of every possible combination of wins, losses and ties in every game. The grid is not hard to use and is not super-secret, it's public information posted on NFL.com. Yet no one in Atlanta's overcrowded management suite -- see below -- bothered to check the Falcons' circumstances coming into the game. You've seen the highlight clip of Mora bellowing angrily into a cell phone on the Falcons' sideline as his players line up to boom the fateful season-ending punt that could have been avoided. Mora is shouting,

"WHAT???? I should have played for a tie???? Why didn't you tell me????" Why didn't you think of this yourself, Mr. Executive Vice President-Head Coach?

Atlanta front office note No. 1: The Falcons have a CEO, a president-general manager, three executive vice presidents, six regular vice presidents, two coordinators, one controller, an executive director, four senior directors, nine regular directors, three managers and someone who has both director and coordinator in his title. Yet none of these 32 fancy-pants-title folks checked the playoff permutations grid. Surely, they were all too busy engaged in bureaucratic turf fighting.

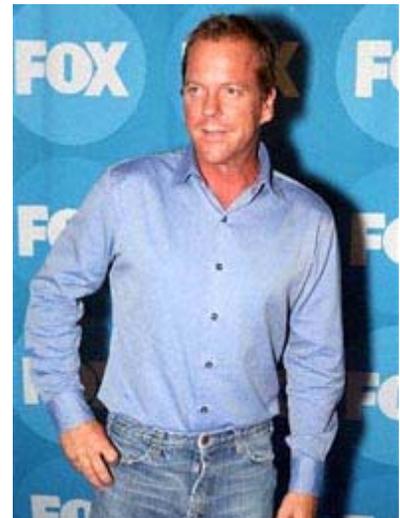
Atlanta front office note No. 2: These 32 fancy-pants officials have made some puzzling decisions. Two of last three years, Atlanta traded its No. 1 choice for a veteran who was demanding a mega-contract from his original team. In both cases, the Falcons swapped a mid-first-rounder, which would have been used on a rookie who would have signed for a manageable bonus, for someone to whom they gave a cap-paralyzing mega-contract. Now, Atlanta has shipped another draft pick, probably a third, for veteran receiver Ashley Lelie, who wants a new contract. Lelie had one touchdown reception in 2005, despite playing for the red-hot Broncos. A sizeable chunk of this season's Atlanta salary cap will be tied up in payments to recently acquired high-priced veterans whom their previous teams wanted to get rid of. When a team wants to get rid of a player, usually there is a reason.

**Will "24" Do An Extra Episode If a Disaster Begins on the Day That Daylight Savings Time Ends?** Now that Keifer Sutherland has won an Emmy for "24," maybe Fox will debut a new show called "365" that is nothing but Sutherland all day long every day. According to the internal reality of the show, Sutherland has single-handedly prevented an assassination, saved Los Angeles from a nuclear bomb, saved Los Angeles from another nuclear bomb, saved Los Angeles from an unstoppable bioweapon, saved Los Angeles from nerve gas, rescued the Secretary of Defense from terrorists, prevented the meltdown of a nuclear reactor, recovered the missing presidential briefcase of missile-launch codes, faked his own death, and done all these things in just five days.

Sure, Sutherland was able to stop the reactor disaster by stealing back from terrorists a government-built device that sends a signal that causes nuclear reactors to melt down. Probably you'd think it would make absolutely no sense for the government to build a device that sends a signal that causes nuclear reactors to melt down - that's why you are not a super-spy and Keifer is. And sure,

Sutherland has the advantage of carrying one of those pistols that never runs out of ammunition no matter how many times it is fired. There sure aren't any spare magazines in the pockets of his extra-tight jeans! (Note to ESPN.com Art Department, have just created an excuse for you to show a beefcake photo of Keifer's buns in jeans.)

Sutherland's gun also can be fired repeatedly in small, enclosed spaces without his ears being damaged, another big plus. But what TMZ really likes about this show is that every time a nuclear warhead or bioweapon is about to destroy California, Sutherland must act alone because *everyone else in the entire United States government is busy*. "Hello Jack? Terrorists just stole an experimental wormhole generator and they're about to use it to rip the fabric of space-time, making



He may have a pistol in his pocket, but no extra ammo clips.

the entire West Coast disappear. Would you mind handling this alone? Everyone else in the entire United States government is in a meeting today."

### **Carolina**

The Panthers made the NFC title game last season, and are a popular choice to advance again this season. Carolina was third in defense, played well on special teams, outscored opponents by an average of a touchdown per game and kicked the tails of the Giants and Bears on the road in the postseason. The Panthers were especially good in the fourth quarter, outscoring opponents 125-72. That Carolina ran out of gas in the title contest at Seattle does not diminish an excellent season.

Here's the only downside: Of the Panthers' 11 regular-season wins, just two came against other playoff teams (the Patriots and Bucs). Look at the rest of Carolina's schedule -- Arizona, Buffalo, Detroit, Jersey/B, New Orleans twice -- there were enough cupcakes to make a "Saturday Night Live" video. The Panthers ended the season performing really well in the playoffs. Whether that was a hot streak or means the team has advanced to elite standing will be determined this fall.

Steve Smith was unstoppable last season, particularly when opponents didn't try to stop him. The decision first by Jersey/A and then Chicago coaches to single-cover Smith was inexplicable, and proved the key factor in these teams' home playoff defeats. Smith had 45 percent of Carolina's receiving yards in 2005, an NFL record for highest share of receiving yards by one player. But if the ball didn't get to Smith, it didn't get to anybody: Ricky Proehl, Carolina's second-most productive receiver, had just 441 receiving yards.

Having seen Smith rip up the Giants' and Bears' single coverage, the Seahawks basically played Smith box-and-one, shutting him down in the NFC Championship Game. Yet Jake Delhomme did not respond by looking for flanker Keary Colbert, who at least three times in the title game was streaking uncovered, his arm raised, as Delhomme forced the ball unsuccessfully toward Smith. Now that Keyshawn Johnson has arrived in Charlotte, presumably there will be more balance in the Cats' passing game. It is essential that Delhomme spread the ball around. Every competent defensive coordinator will have looked at tape of how Seattle frustrated Smith, and emulate the tactic.

Panthers note No. 1: Now that oft-injured power back Stephen Davis has departed, Tim Biakabutuka remains Carolina's all-time leading rusher -- with just 2,530 career yards.

Panthers note No. 2: Increasingly, NFL teams seek offseason revenue by renting stadium facilities for corporate meetings. At Bank of America Stadium, [corporate groups can rent a meeting room](#) with full-sized goal posts, play host to a luncheon in a replica Panthers' locker room (no replicas of moldy towels, one hopes) or convene in a "simulated" press box. The food in the simulated press box looks pretty good, so I guess it's not that realistic.

### **Chicago**

The Bears defense allowed just 195 points in 2005, among the most impressive achievements in the league last season. Now factor in that the Bears' defense also scored 35 points (crediting point-afters to the D) and the net allowed by Chicago defenders was a spectacularly low 10 points per game. It ended badly as Chicago, playing at home in the divisional round, allowed Carolina 29 points. The Ming Ding Xiong ("Bears whose outcomes are decided by fate" in Mandarin) had a bye week while Carolina was performing on the road at Jersey/A, yet the Panthers seemed more ready for the game. The Giants had tried to cover Smith one-on-one and paid the price, especially on stop-and-go moves; inexplicably, Chicago gave no safety help to the corners covering Smith, who bit repeatedly on the stop-and-go. An inglorious end to a season that saw Chicago win its division with cupcake help, finishing 2-3 against other teams that made the playoffs.

As to the Chicago offense -- Ye gods! Subtracting for points scored on defense and special teams, the Bears generated just 14 points per game on offense, which is awful. Bears quarterbacks threw more interceptions than touchdown passes, also awful. Kyle Orton was hardly the only problem. Offensive performance did not change much when Rex Grossman stepped in, and both quarterbacks finished the season with identically bad 59.7 passer ratings. Now Brian Griese takes over, and though he is a career 79.6 passer, last season he threw as many interceptions as touchdown passes. Maybe that's what drew the Bears to him.

Chicago note No. 1: Soldier Field fans were treated to the NFL's lowest scoring games, an average result of 19-8. Why is it Chicago's field perennially makes both the Bears and their opponents struggle to attain points? Are there kryptonite deposits beneath the stadium?

Chicago note No. 2: Prosecutors charged the cleaning lady of former Bears cornerback Jerry Azumah with stealing \$251,000 from him. The Chicago Tribune headline: FORMER BEAR TAKEN TO CLEANERS.

**Wacky Food of the Week** Reader Lysa Whitt points out this delight served at Mulligan's, an Atlanta tavern: "[A hot dog wrapped by a beef patty](#) that's deep fried, covered with chili, cheese and onions and served on a hoagie bun, topped with a fried egg and two fistfuls of fries." The tavern also offers a double cheeseburger served between two Krispy Kreme donuts. Apparently, Mulligans does not want its patrons to survive for return visits.

## Dallas

Remember when the Cowboys were a monster team? If you do, then you probably remember when Robert Goulet was synonymous with beefcake. The Dallas Cowboys, who took home three Lombardi Trophies in the mid-1990s, have not won a playoff contest since 1996 and are 40-57 in the 21st century.

The Cowboys' decline has been strangely unemotional. Dallas has fielded three consecutive strangely unemotional coaches -- Chan Gailey, Dave Campo and Bill Parcells. All seemed unfazed by letdown after letdown; Parcells gives the impression of being annoyed that he must attend Cowboys' games. Fans have been strangely unemotional: There's been no rending of garments, no gnashing of teeth, no Texas angst. Owner Jerry Jones has been strangely unemotional, enduring disappointing season after disappointing season without tirades, seemingly not even particularly concerned. Even [the cheerleaders](#) no longer look like the league's hottest. They look bored and late for something they would rather be doing.

Into this strangely unemotional landscape we introduce -- Terrell Owens.

TMQ is sick of T.O.'s act and does not know anyone who isn't. Yet maybe this guy is what the Cowboys need to reconnect with their emotional selves. Dallas seems to lack enthusiasm about football, and who would have thought that would ever be said about a Texas city? Owens isn't exactly what the doctor ordered, more like what the meshuggener ordered. Perhaps he can light the fire in Dallas, if only by making the rest of the team want to perform in order to shut him up. Of course, first he must make the team. When Owens signed his Cowboys' contract, he released a rap song in which he boasted, "I got what I wanted up front, 10 mil," the amount he demanded in



Once the world's most handsome man, now looking for work as a restaurant greeter.

Philadelphia. Actually, Owens got only half upfront. He must be on the Dallas opening-day roster to receive the second \$5 million, and with Owens, nothing is certain until it happens.

**Maybe Someday I'll Be Called "Puckish"** Last week, the United Kingdom's Independent newspaper ran [a retrospective of obituaries of renown cricket aficionados](#). Prominent was Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, but also among them was my distant relative Basil Easterbrook, 1920-1995, an English cricket and football (that is, soccer) writer. "Easterbrook was a much-loved member of the press corps with a puckish humour," reads the obit. Let's hope mine is as favorable. Oh, and in my obituary, please spell "debonair" correctly.

## **Detroit**

It has been asked before but bears repeating -- what bizarre Rasputin-like hold does Matt Millen have over the Ford family, owners of the Lions? In 2001, the Lions hired Millen, a broadcaster with no management experience of any kind, to be the team's president and CEO. He started at the top in both positions, rather than learning first. Since the point Millen took over, the Lions have the worst record in the NFL at 21-59. And Millen did not accede to a faltering team: The club he inherited had gone 9-7 and missed the playoffs only when an opponent hit an improbable 54-yard field goal on the final play of the final regular-season game.

Weirdly, the team's [official bio](#) says of Millen, "With a paramount desire to steer the Lions' franchise in a new direction ... Lions' chairman and owner William Clay Ford appointed Matt Millen to the position of president and CEO (on) Jan. 9, 2001." Millen has steered the Lions in a "new direction" all right -- from winner to laughingstock! Yet the Ford family recently awarded Millen with a contract extension.

Thank goodness Millen has nothing to do with the production of Ford's cars. Maybe the Fords should hire Carlos Ghosn to run the Lions. And if Web site management is any indicator of larger problems, the Lions are even worse than feared. Millen's official bio on the team's site boasts of his genius in drafting Joey Harrington, Charles Rogers and Mike Williams.

Horrible drafting has plagued the Lions under Millen, and let's briefly review how horrible. In 2002, Detroit used the third overall selection of the draft on Harrington, since run out of town on a rail. In 2003, the team used the second overall selection on Rogers, who has 36 receptions in three years -- which would be an OK figure for a backup tight end, but not for a wide receiver taken second overall. In 2005, Detroit burned the 10th overall selection on Williams, who is third string and might be waived were it not for the salary-cap penalty this would cause.

Who was selected by other teams shortly after these blown picks? In order to take Harrington, Detroit passed on Dwight Freeney, Levi Jones, John Henderson and Roy Williams. To take Rogers, Detroit passed on Kevin Williams, Jordan Gross, Troy Polamalu, Terrell Suggs, Byron Leftwich and Andre Johnson, who made the Pro Bowl at Rogers' position. To take Williams, Detroit passed on the next two guys selected, DeMarcus Ware and Shawne Merriman. In each of these years, choose any name from the list of players Detroit passed on, and the Lions might be a different team today.

Hmmm -- suppose Millen did have something to do with the production of Ford's cars. Here would be Millen's business plan for the current Ford corporate predicament.

- Cancel production of all hybrids and high-mileage cars, commit to manufacturing an ultra-large SUV called the Godzilla.

- Reject the Nissan alliance and form a joint venture with Fiat.

- Close Ford Motor Credit. As the company's profitable division, it is a constant distraction.

Cancel the beautiful new Mustang, Ford's hottest-selling product. It's retro -- we need to steer in a new direction!

Hire lots of older workers and give them guaranteed pensions and health-care benefits.

### **Green Bay**

"Everybody keeps talking about lack of talent on the Packers. I've been around less, I'll say that." -- New Green Bay coach Mike McCarthy to Tom Silverstein of the Milwaukee Journal.

Well then. There's a ringing endorsement! One of my favorite sports quotes comes from the hapless former Buffalo Bills coach Hank Bullough, who preceded Hall of Famer Marv Levy. Bullough said, "We keep beating ourselves, but we're getting better at it." McCarthy's "I've been around less talent" has the same warm, hopeful quality.

The Packers finished first in pass defense in 2005, so there's a temptation to say that at least McCarthy has some defensive talent to work with. But the Jets finished second in pass defense, the Saints third, the Browns fourth -- losing teams tend to have good pass-defense stats because opponents are ahead in the second half and attempt few passes. The Bears, at fifth overall, were the sole winning team of 2005 with a top-rated pass defense. The four championship-round teams finished ninth in pass defense (Carolina), 16th (Pittsburgh), 25th (Seattle) and 29th (Denver). The championship-round teams were usually ahead in the second half, and so got thrown on more often.

Talent is especially a concern on the offensive line. If Brett Favre is to have any victories in his victory-lap season, he needs to remain upright. Yet new Green Bay general manager Ted Thompson has shown little interest in offensive line issues. Arriving in the winter of 2005, Thompson's first big decision was to make no attempt to resign the Packers' stellar guards, Mike Wahle and Marco Rivera. Yes, Green Bay had salary cap problems, but a general manager concerned with the survival of an aging star quarterback would have found a way to keep one or the other. This winter, Thompson let center Mike Flanagan walk as a free agent, while signing no important free agent for the offensive line. Favre might get hit a lot or forced into a lot of ill-advised releases to get rid of the ball. But, I've been around offensive lines with less talent, I'll say that.

Packers note No. 1: Green Bay is the sole NFC team with a winning road record in the past decade.

Packers note No. 2: Thompson's title is "executive vice president, general manager and director of football operations." Imagine trying to explain to Alfred P. Sloan or Arthur D. Little why modern executives need such puffed-up titles to make themselves feel important.

Packers note No. 3: Green Bay is the NFL's only publicly owned franchise, making its annual report the best window into NFL club finances. For their last fiscal year, which was basically the 2005 season, the Packers disclosed operating revenue of \$208 million, up from \$200 million the previous year, and profits of \$18 million, down from \$25 million. Don Walker of the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel reported that last season's total player costs for the Packers were \$103 million, while the salary cap was \$86 million that year. (Player health care and pensions do not count against the cap.) Total operating expenses, meaning player costs and all other costs, were \$188 million. The team created a fund against future increased health-care costs and future costs of firing coaches, explaining why profit was somewhat lower than it otherwise might have been. So the Packers are now saving against the cost (contract buy-outs) of firing coaches. So should every NFL team!

**News from Space** This column often observes that every time instruments or research techniques improve, the universe is seen to be bigger and life to be older. The universe just grew again, this time by about 15 percent. Researchers led by Krzysztof Stanek of Ohio State -- he's one of the hot names in astronomy -- demonstrated that a [galaxy called M33](#) is 3 million light years away, not 2.6 million light years as had been believed since the 1950s. This is telling because M33 is known to astronomers as the Triangulum Galaxy, and used as a yardstick for measuring cosmic distances. If it's 15 percent farther away, that might mean everything in deep space is 15 percent farther away, and thus the universe 15 percent larger and 15 percent older than assumed. Stanek's finding further suggests the Hubble Constant, used to measure intergalactic distance, might be off in a manner that systematically understates the magnitude of the distant cosmos. Should Stanek prove right, that would get us up to roughly 60 billion galaxies in existence for 16 billion years, as opposed to the current consensus guess of about 50 billion galaxies formed 14 billion years ago. And just wait till the next advance in instruments.



Every year it's farther away  
-- sort of like the day you  
pay off those credit cards.

### **Jersey/A**

The Jets are moving their team headquarters to New Jersey, ending the last major tie of either "New York" team to New York. "We're the only NFL team left in the state," Melvin Fowler of the Buffalo Bills said last month. A reader offers, in haiku, this slight correction, since the Giants still hold summer camp at the University of Albany:

Gotham's ties not torn:  
Jersey/A yet practicing  
Yon upstate New York.  
-- Wray Blattner, Dayton, Ohio

John Branch of the New York Times recently reported that few "New York" Giants live in New York, either. One of the few is Tiki Barber, and exposure to New York culture seems to have worked well for him. Barber is known to this column as TTNy, The Toast of New York, for his combination of on-field performance and all-around good-guy achievements in Manhattan philanthropy, society-set life and news reporting. Note of Barber that his media appearances, with Fox News, have to do with news, not sports-yak. A fair number of professional athletes become involved in soft-media stuff such as reality shows and celebrity reporting, how many go into news commentary?

Anyway, because [the Office of Management and Budget](#) recently divided the nation into Core-Based Statistical Areas, Barber could be TTNyNJCSA -- The Toast of the New York-New Jersey Core-Based Statistical Area. With government flair for brevity, the Census Bureau now calls the same region the New York-Newark-Bridgeport-New York-New Jersey-Connecticut-Pennsylvania Combined Statistical Area. Using airport codes, this makes Tiki TTLGAJFKTEBEWRBDRNYNJCTPACSA. Or one could employ the agency's jaunty shorthand and call Barber TT408, The Toast of Census Bureau Region 408. Whatever you call him, Tiki Barber is a mensch.

Giants note: Eli Manning took every snap at quarterback in 2005. At least Jersey/A got its money's worth on that monster contract!

## **Minnesota**

It's sink or swim for the Vikings staff in 2006. Minnesota has a new head coach who has never been a head coach, assisted by an offensive coordinator who has never been an offensive coordinator and a defensive coordinator who has never been a defensive coordinator. Disarray extends to other areas. Last season, the Vikings finally had a half-decent year on defense -- then promptly allowed four defensive starters to depart in free agency. The flame-out of Koren Robinson coupled to the nothingburger first season of highly drafted Troy Williamson leave the Vikes weak at wide receiver. Since management unloaded Randy Moss, the Minnesota offense has sputtered, finishing in the bottom third statistically last season. The running back situation isn't encouraging either.

The Vikings got into the playoff picture in 2005 by taking seven of its last nine games, but only two victories came over teams that finished with a winning record. On the season, Minnesota went 2-5 against opponents with winning records, and one of those wins came in a meaningless regular-season finale contest against a Bears team that already had locked its seeding and was resting starters. Given Minnesota's novice coaches and roster holes, it's unrealistic to expect much more than a rebuilding season.

Vikings fade-out note: In the past decade, Minnesota has winning records in September, October and November and a losing record in December. And this season the NFL plays five December games.

Vikings front office note: Minnesota sets some sort of record by having three people with the title "owner" -- Owner/Chairman Zygmunt Wilf, Owner/President Mark Wilf and Owner/Vice Chairman Leonard Wilf.

Vikings cheerleaders note: Minnesota's cheer squad might not rival Philadelphia or Washington for dance complexity, but certainly offers lots of northern beauties. Here are the [Vikings cheerleader veterans](#) in a pose that includes only slightly fewer women than TMQ's standard fantasy.

## **New Orleans**

Sports teams can have rebuilding years but this is ridiculous -- New Orleans is rebuilding an entire city. The Saints were 3-13 last season, playing a regular away slate plus games in San Antonio and Baton Rouge. Considering NFL teams were .410 on the road in 2005, New Orleans' all-away finish seems less bad. Meanwhile, Tuesday Morning Quarterback continues to be amazed by the New Orleans-Jersey/A link. Last season the Giants were, before Katrina, the first team scheduled to appear at the Saints. This game was held in the Meadowlands, making the Giants the sole club in NFL annals to play nine regular-season home games, and helping grant the Giants the standings edge that gave them the NFC East title over Washington. (Had the Giants played the Saints in New Orleans in 2005 and lost, the Redskins would have won the division by tiebreaker.) A schedule formula determined years ago called for New Orleans to play at the Meadowlands in 2006. I remain scandalized that this game has not been shifted to New Orleans, paying back the Saints for one aspect of their 2005 handicap and paying back the rest of the league for the standings gift Jersey/A was granted in 2005. The Giants are the sentimental-favorite club of most NFL staffers at league headquarters on Park Avenue. You've got to suspect that if any other team except the Giants had been involved in this pairing oddity, that team would be playing seven home dates in 2006 and traveling to New Orleans for the Saints' extra home game.

New Orleans had a decent defense in 2005, though its return on recent draft investments has been small. The Saints have invested four recent No. 1 picks on their defensive line (Charles Grant, Will Smith and two No. 1s traded for Jonathan Sullivan) yet in 2005 were 27th against the run and 31st in sacks. New management has cut the losses: In June, New Orleans traded Sullivan and Courtney

Watson, total investment two recent No. 1s and a recent No. 2, for a couple of backups. Meanwhile, New Orleans added Drew Brees and Reggie Bush. Brees is a quality performer; Bush has as much chance as anybody to be that rare impact rookie. New Orleans might benefit from a fantastic 12th Man effect. When the team returns to the Superdome on Sept. 25th -- and oh look, it's on ESPN -- the crowd energy and emotion will be poignant. Last season everything that could have gone wrong did go wrong for New Orleans. This year the Saints will have more wind at their backs than any professional sports team in memory.

Reggie note: Many cannot understand why Bush is forbidden to wear No. 5. Offensive linemen must be numbered from 50 to 79 in order to help officials enforce the eligibility rule. Otherwise, who cares which player wears what jersey number? The NFL once forbade Brian Bosworth from wearing No. 44 at linebacker in Seattle, and this year will allow linebacker Julian Peterson to wear No. 44 for the same team. How silly it is to say the number system is critical in one case and can be waived in another! Except for offensive linemen, any player should be allowed to don any digits. That's the way it is in college, and the earth is not rent asunder. The NFL is at heart a form of entertainment, and watching Reggie jitterbug in No. 5 would provide maximum entertainment.

Superdome note: Superdome roof repairs included a daily helicopter-delivered catered meal atop the crown so workers did not have to climb down 21 stories of catwalks during their lunch break. Mary Foster of the Associated Press reported that contractors built "a small village" on the Superdome roof, including restrooms, safety equipment and pads onto which supplies were lowered from helicopters.

### **Philadelphia**

My first Tuesday Morning Quarterback NFC preview, seven years ago, began by complaining that the Eagles were complacent about the running back position. I used the same item pretty much word-for-word in August 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004 and 2005. I've now simply placed the item into my AutoText: "Once again the Eagles seem content to enter the season without a power back and without depth at running back." Maybe a team that passed on 57 percent of its plays in 2005 doesn't care about the running game. But wait -- that figure is for passes *when Philadelphia led in the second half*. That's right, when leading in the second half, the Eagles nevertheless threw more than they ran. Counting sacks and scrambles, last season Philadelphia coaches called 721 passes and 365 rushes, the 66 percent pass ratio trailing only Arizona for the league's least-balanced attack. Perhaps Philadelphia coaches say to themselves, "We're got to pass, we have nobody who can run the ball." Then get somebody who can run!

Now the Terrell Owens business is over for the Nesharim -- Eagles in Hebrew. (Philadelphia is the sole NFL team whose logo [faces right to left](#), as does Hebrew.) Philadelphia fans wish the 2005 season had been one of those science-fiction shows where incredible things happen and then at the end, everyone wakes up to discover it was just a dream. Well, 2005 was plenty real for Philadelphia. But the Eagles remain one of the NFL's best clubs of recent outings, and TMQ thinks football pundits are selling them short by speaking as if their run is over.

Beefcake note: The same agent represented Philadelphia's No. 1 draft choice, defensive tackle Brodrick Bunkley, and fifth-round selection, athlete/male model Jeremy Bloom. The agent told the Philadelphia Inquirer he gets more media calls about Bloom.

### **St. Louis**

The Rams had a rare three No. 1 draft choices in 2001, and all of them are gone. St. Louis' middle-round picks from that draft are gone, too. You can't whiff an entire draft without starting a cycle of decline, and that is what has happened to the former Super Bowl victors. Les Mouflons (Rams in

French) had only one win over a playoff team in 2005, while losing twice to the lowly 49ers. Kurt Warner departed two years ago; Isaac Bruce and Marshall Faulk are shadows of their old selves; Richie Incognito is listed as a 2006 starter, and I bet you don't even know who he is. OK, sportswriters -- the season hasn't even started and that joke has now been used up.

Marc Bulger finished strong last year with a 94.4 rating, and ESPN.com's KC Joyner says Bulger was the league's most accurate passer -- impressive since Bulger threw deep so much. Otherwise The Greatest Show on Turf will likely this year be A Show That Happens to Occur on Turf. And the Rams' defense last season was pliant, which even the defensive-minded Jim Haslett probably cannot fix in just one year.

Les Mouflons note: The Rams' colors are, officially, New Century Gold and Millennium Blue. In 2101, will they change the name to Old Century Gold?

**Fox Calls Bill O'Reilly "A Former Thinker"** [Fox Sports' own bio](#) describes football pundit John Czarnecki as "a former sportswriter."

### **San Francisco**

When you finish the season last in offense and last in defense, you've got problems. Given how bad San Francisco was statistically in 2005, it's vaguely amazing the Squared Sevens won four games. Among its many lasts, San Francisco ended the season last in passing offense. The Niners have thrown draft picks at this problem, using the first overall selection of 2005 on a quarterback and three of their four top picks in 2006 on receivers. The fix might or might not work, but at least San Francisco management has taken action regarding the passing attack -- though TMQ continues to feel the chain of events that led San Francisco to spend that first overall pick on Alex Smith, then to pass on California golden boy Matt Leinart in the 2006 draft, is one Niners fans will be ruing for years to come.

But while there's hope on offense, defense is another matter. San Francisco also finished last in passing defense. This finish was especially dreadful considering the Niners lost 12 games and were blown out six times, meaning opponents held comfortable leads and threw little after intermission. Denver finished 29th in pass defense in 2005, but as Aaron Schatz of [footballoutsiders.com](#) has noted, much of the surrendered yardage came after the Broncos attained big second-half leads and removed starting defenders from the contest. Green Bay finished first in pass defense in 2005 because opponents were way ahead in the second half and didn't attempt many throws. So the fact that San Francisco finished 4-12, facing opponents who threw little in the second half, yet ended up last in passing defense, is pitiful. What did San Francisco do to shore up its secondary? The Niners did not draft any cornerbacks and signed only one, Walt Harris. Meanwhile, San Francisco lost its best defensive performer, Julian Peterson, to free agency. Ye gods.

Radio City note: During the NFL draft at one point I stood next to San Francisco's first selection, Vernon Davis, who is astonishingly large and sculpted. I said to him, "What does the sky look like on your home world?" Davis laughed, but maybe he was just being polite.

## Seattle

Traditionally the Super Bowl runner-up plays host in one of the NFL's headliner games on opening weekend. This September the Seattle Seahawks open at -- umm, Detroit. In the NFL's return-to-action weekend Atlanta, Carolina, Indianapolis, Jersey/A, Miami, Minnesota, Oakland, Pittsburgh, San Diego and Washington appear in an unprecedented bonanza of nationally televised games -- while Seattle at Detroit will be beamed solely to Wayne County and King County. On opening weekend four teams that did not make the playoffs in 2005 will perform in nationally televised prime-time games, while Super Bowl entrant Seattle isn't seen. Over the season's early weeks, 14 teams appear nationally in prime-time contests, including seven clubs that did not make the playoffs, before the Blue Men Group take their first night-game bow at Chicago on October 1.

But the league isn't mad at Mike Holmgren for criticizing the officials. Heck no!

In 2005, Shaun Alexander set an NFL record with 28 touchdowns, and what really impressed the determined TMQ readers who reviewed miles of tape was that 15 of these touchdowns came on *untouched* runs. Only two other NFL players, Larry Johnson and LaDainian Tomlinson, had 15 touchdowns last season; Alexander had 15 touchdowns on which no one so much as brushed him! Now Hawks fans are worried that Alexander is on the cover of the new Madden video game, and previous cover boys Eddie George (2000), Daunte Culpepper (2001), Marshall Faulk (2002), Michael Vick (2003), Ray Lewis (2004) and Donovan McNabb (2005) all promptly got hurt or had off years. But Alexander will continue to run behind one of the league's best offensive lines. Steve Hutchinson is gone to Minnesota, but the Tuesday Morning Quarterback Non-QB Non-RB NFL MVP of 2005, tackle Walter Jones, returns. And attention must be paid to Seattle's other tackle, Sean Locklear, whom KC Joyner rated the most efficient blocker in the NFL in 2005. Come on Seahawks, you know the league front office wants you to go away. Drive them crazy and return to the Super Bowl!



Will Alexander suffer from the Madden curse?

Cheer-babes note: Reader John Elkin of Vancouver, Wash., commends to our attention the minimalist new warm-weather uniforms [the Sea Gals](#) will debut in 2006.

Urban renewal note: Seattle plans to move its headquarters to Renton, Wash. The facility under construction will have a 120,000-square foot office, locker room and medical complex, plus an indoor practice field. It's on Lake Washington, on 20 acres owned by Hawks owner Paul Allen. He would give up Lake Washington real estate! Much of the Lake Washington shoreline is already developed, and remaining virgin real estate is extremely valuable. But Allen has had trouble developing this particular parcel, which is adjacent to an old Superfund site that once held toxic waste. Most studies show that Superfund sites pose no threat to public health. Now, if the Gatorade begins to glow ...



Sea Gals to sport new "Hello, Sailor" look this fall.

### **Tampa**

The Buccaneers lost a lot of close games in 2004 and won a lot of close games in 2005. Many NFL games are close -- last season 45 percent were decided by a touchdown or less. And of course you prevail in a lot of close games if you have the league's No. 1 defense. For Tampa it all boiled down to a strange home loss in the first round of the playoffs. The Bucs' defense held the visiting Redskins to just [nine first downs and 120 yards of offense](#), but Tampa succumbed owing to killer turnovers and two missed fourth-down tries in the fourth quarter. The game, of course, was close.

One auspicious sign for Tampa's upcoming season is that linebacker Derrick Brooks took a pay cut in order to close out his career with the Bucs. This means the defense is likely to play well again -- more than any other person on the roster, Brooks makes the Tampa 2 defense work with his combination of speed and field sense. That Brooks stayed home also strengthens his eventual Hall of Fame bid. The Canton electors tend to look askance at performers who are in it strictly for the money, while rewarding those who show loyalty to their city. It is a wise policy, and one more star players approaching the ends of their careers should be aware of. Playing every down with the same team gets you valuable bonus points in the Canton ballot. Compare to, say, Ted Washington. By performance he is among the best defensive linemen ever. But he's squeezed so many helmets over his head -- San Francisco, Denver, Buffalo, Chicago, New England, Oakland and now Cleveland -- after complaining so often about his paycheck that Canton electors should turn thumbs down. Brooks, by contrast, is now sure to be fitted for a garish yellow sportsjacket.

### **Washington**

Once again the moment midnight of free agency arrived, Chainsaw Dan Snyder revved up his turbocharged checkbook. Once again the Redskins snagged what seems on paper the league's best free-agency haul, including big-name players Adam Archuleta, Andre Carter and Antwaan Randle El. Chainsaw Dan granted these and other newly acquired gents contracts with a paper value of about \$130 million, including about \$35 million in bonuses or other guarantees. Only about \$13 million of the bonuses and guarantees count against this year's cap, meaning some \$22 million in accounting charges are being delayed to future years -- nearly insuring another Washington cap crash in the future.

Were the acquisitions worth it? Archuleta has enjoyed mojo publicity, but in 2005 looked like an average safety playing for a 30th-ranked defense. Carter was chosen high in the draft, but in 2005 looked like an average defensive end playing for the 32nd-ranked defense. If Archuleta and Carter are so good, why were the defenses they played on two of the league's three worst? Randle El is cool and widely admired, but in 2005 had just 35 receptions and one touchdown. Other Chainsaw Dan acquisitions included quarterback Todd Collins, receiver Brandon Lloyd and power back T.J. Duckett. Collins was once a fair-haired boy but has thrown one touchdown pass in the last eight seasons. Lloyd and Duckett are underachievers whom their previous employers wanted to unload; Washington gave both money and a bushel of mid-round draft picks to acquire them. While the Redskins were spending freely for those whom other teams wished to discard, Washington failed to re-sign two of its own free agents: Robert Royals, last year the best blocking tight end in the NFL, and safety Ryan Clark, who had a Pro Bowl-caliber season. It might turn out that after spending a huge amount in money and draft choices, the Redskins will wish they had simply kept together the squad that finished strong last season.



Randle El will be expected to put up bigger numbers in Washington.

Meanwhile the Skins, who have had the fewest draft picks since 2000, already have traded away their second, third and fourth choices of 2007, and even traded away a 2008 pick! In Washington, the "the future is now" formula has been in practice so long it should be changed to "the past was then." Washington had no first-round selection in 2006, and quarterback Jason Campbell, taken in the first round in 2005, might not contribute this season, meaning no young-talent infusion. Sooner or later the Skins' profligate ways will catch up with them.

Redskins victories note: Washington has the best current opening-day streak, with four consecutive wins.

Redskins staff note: Joe Gibbs' staff includes three former head coaches: Joe Bugel, Al Saunders and the tastefully named Gregg Williams. Williams in turn has three assistants who have been defensive coordinators: Greg Blache, Jerry Gray and Dale Lindsey.

Redskins titles note: Several teams now have gentlemen bearing the title Assistant Head Coach, among them Mike Sherman in Houston and Marty Mornhinweg in Philadelphia. Assistant Head Coach is not simply an honorific for former head coaches working as assistants, as Jim Fassel, Jim Haslett, Mike Martz and others who once were bosses do not now carry this title in their assistant roles. At Miami, Dom Capers sounds even better as Special Assistant to the Head Coach. But no sideline tops that of the Redskins, which has both an Assistant Head Coach, the tastefully named Gregg Williams, and the league's only Associate Head Coach, Saunders. What's next for Washington -- a Provost and a Dean of Players?

**Reader Animadversion:** Got a complaint or a deeply held grievance? Write me at [TMQ\\_ESPN@yahoo.com](mailto:TMQ_ESPN@yahoo.com). Include your real name and the name of your hometown, and I may quote you by name unless you instruct me otherwise. Note: giving your hometown improves your odds of being quoted.

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

**Monday, September 4, 2006**

**Updated: September 6, 10:35 AM ET**

The only all-haiku NFL preview

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By Gregg Easterbrook

Finally the real thing approaches and the NFL artificial universe resumes. Pause now to contemplate this: you will behold your favorite team snap the ball 1,000 times this season. Some laws of nature seem plucked from a hat, such as Planck's constant, which is 6.626 times  $10^{-34}$  joule-seconds. Others seem hauntingly round numbers; during a normal lifespan, the human heart beats two billion times. Another hauntingly round-number constant is Easterbrook's Law of 1,000 Plays.

Seattle ran 1,020 plays last season, Tampa ran 985. Atlanta ran 1,021 plays, and so did Jacksonville. San Diego ran 1,022 plays, while Oakland snapped the ball 997 times and Cincinnati 1,018 times. Everyone in the league was within a pollster's standard margin of error of 1,000 snaps, and it's been that way since the 16-game format was adopted. Each time your team runs a play this season, you are beholding one in a thousand: and every snap reduces the time remaining on the season by one-tenth of 1 percent. Savor each snap. Like practically everything in our short lives, the season will go by amazingly fast.

And now -- *still* America's only all-haiku NFL season predictions!

AFC East

Cut costs, yet win games:

Pats the Wal-Mart of pro sports.

The Flying Elvii.

Forecast finish: 12-4

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Bikini heaven!  
Not South Beach -- the cheerleaders.  
Miami Dolphins.  
Forecast finish: 10-6

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Harvard GM, Yale  
coach. Lead league in SATs.  
The Buffalo Bills.  
Forecast finish: 6-10

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Have league's youngest coach.  
Does Mangini get carded?  
The Jersey/B Jets.  
Forecast finish: 4-12

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**Cheerleading Squad of the Week:** Speaking of the Dolphins  
Cheerleaders, [here they are](#) in their glory. The new Dolphins' Cheerleaders [calendar](#) is not exactly  
shy about the key to their appeal. Bud Light sponsors [this view](#) of Fins cheerleaders in Bimini,  
while the Dolphins are now "presented by Wachovia" and their season "[delivered by DHL](#)." Does  
that mean if you don't like a game, you can mark it Return to Sender? [Nick Saban has a blog](#). "Golf  
is kind of like a metaphor of life," Saban muses.

AFC North  
Cowher crowned; now must  
find reason to keep growling.  
The Pittsburgh Steelers.  
Forecast finish: 13-3

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Trick or treat! Team has  
Halloween every Sunday.  
The Cincy Bengals.  
Forecast finish: 9-7

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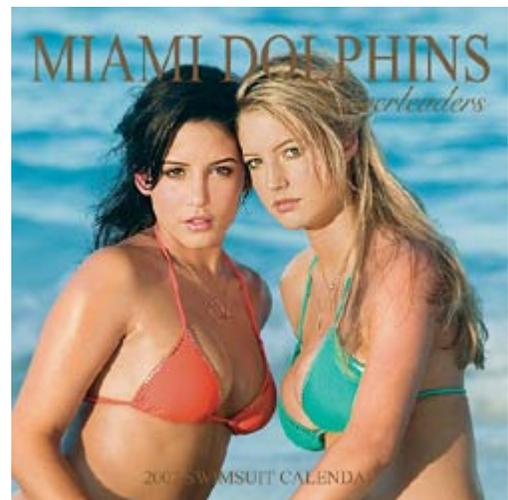
The public beta  
of new version 3.0.  
Latest Cleveland Browns.  
Forecast finish: 9-7

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It's Sunday at 1,  
do you know who QB is?  
Bal-a-mer Ravens.



It's easier to bring South  
Beach to the stadium than  
bring the game to the  
beach.



Miami's cheerleaders will never be  
accused of being overdressed.

Forecast finish: 6-10

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**In Praise of Losing Teams -- College Edition:** What if the defending champion Pittsburgh Steelers played only the Houston Texans and Detroit Lions in 2006 -- and played every game at home? That is the scenario evolving in football-factory big-college football, where teams can choose many opponents, and increasingly choose cupcakes with cherries on top.



Local bakery item -- or West Virginia's home opponents?

Consider West Virginia, hyped on a Sports Illustrated cover and chosen by CBS Sportsline as favored to play in the BCS title bowl. West Virginia's schedule is among the weakest, if not *the* weakest, of 119 teams in Division I. The Mountaineers play just three schools that finished 2005 with winning records, and only one that appeared in the top 25. Here is the [West Virginia schedule](#), which might as well be a cupcake menu at the local bakery.

There's Eastern Washington, not even in Division I-A. There's Syracuse, 1-10 last season, and Mississippi State, 2-9. The Mountaineers' home opponents stumbled to a combined 34-47 in 2005; their road opponents were also losers, a combined 21-24. Four of the 10 teams on the schedule of my son's high school team made the state playoffs in 2005; his high-school team plays a significantly tougher schedule than West Virginia! Perhaps someone on West Virginia's schedule will turn out to be a hot opponent: you never know. But based on the schedule, West Virginia plans to take the 2006 season off, then demand a BCS bowl bid.

Taking the season off and then demanding a bowl bid became easier for the football factory schools this season as Division I expanded to 12 games. The added weekend makes financial sense given that big-school football is among the few collegiate sports that is a net producer of revenue. But with a 12-game slate and six wins required for bowl eligibility, an orangutan could coach a top 25 school into a bowl.

Plus, the football factory colleges increasingly shun the road, paying lesser schools to come to them and be clobbered. The Mountaineers play seven of 12 at home; just imagine what the Denver Broncos' record would be if they could play 10 of 16 at home. Nebraska, Michigan, Miami of Florida, Ohio State, Oklahoma and Notre Dame all fearlessly play seven with the home-crowd advantage and just five on the road. Virginia Tech takes the cake, or in this case the cupcake -- Virginia Tech has eight home games versus four road dates. The Hokies and Mountaineers join hands across the Blue Ridge for college football's phoniest 2006 schedules!

In order for the football factories to play most games at home, the downtrodden must be willing to travel. This year the University of Buffalo has seven road dates and five home appearances. As Pete Thamel reported in the New York Times, the hapless Bulls, perennial losers, are in such demand as a visiting cupcake that their fee for appearing at a big school has risen to \$600,000. The Bulls were originally scheduled to play at West Virginia this fall -- hmm, why does that not surprise us? -- but balked because the Mountaineers offered only \$350,000, below the prevailing market price. This season the University of Buffalo has away games at Wisconsin, Auburn and Boston College.

Let's hope the University of Buffalo knocks off some cocky football-factory school that basically wants the Bulls to be movie extras, standing around watching home-team players streak past. All cupcake teams can draw inspiration from Saturday's game in Boulder, where the University of Colorado was beaten by Division I-AA Montana State, which Colorado had hired expecting an effortless walkover. And let's hope that as the price of visiting cupcakes continues to rise, at least this will improve the Gini coefficient of college football, reducing inequity of funds. This year Nebraska is paying Troy University \$750,000 to come and presumably get clobbered, raising the cupcake prevailing rate close to the million mark. Wouldn't it be a great day if Troy won! Regardless, likely-to-lose teams



Hey, you got University of Buffalo on your schedule too!

-- demand \$1 million per appearance! It's a seller's market, max out the price of your services!

AFC South

Annual playoff

choke; please call Dr. Heimlich!

Indy Lucky Charms.

Forecast finish: 12-4

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Motto: When in doubt,

punt. Punts doomed '05 season.

Jacksonville Jaguars.

Forecast finish: 10-6

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Forget the Titans!

That's the word till team rebounds.

The Flaming Thumbtacks.

Forecast finish: 5-11

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Four years, 10 home wins.

Reliant crowd leaves early.

The Houston Texans.

Forecast finish: 4-12

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**Bust-a-Rama:** The Lions waived bust wide receiver Charles Rogers, second selection of the 2003 draft, and the Jags placed bust tackle Mike Williams, fourth selection of the 2002 draft, on injured reserve after he reported out of shape and immediately hurt himself. Rogers got a \$14.2 million signing bonus and made 36 career receptions -- \$395,000 per catch. What's puzzling about Williams is that after he was benched and then waived by Buffalo at the end of 2005, Jax awarded him a \$1.4 million signing bonus, funds he keeps though it seems unlikely he will ever play a down for Jacksonville. The Jags gave Williams a nice bonus *after* it was known he was a bust. At least the Lions can say they showered money on Rogers before knowing what they were buying.



He charges \$395,000 per catch. Per drop? You can't afford it.

**In Praise of the Losing Team -- High School Version:** The reverse of high school teams that run up the score are high school teams that never win. Red Boiling Springs in Macon County, Tenn., a countryside school with only a few hundred students in the upper grades, has not won a game since 2002, and has been outscored 287-24 in its past five outings. Reader Nick Meals of Knoxville protested that the Tennessean, Nashville's newspaper, just put the school's football futility on Page 1: "Is it right that the lead story in one of the major newspapers in the state focuses on the losing streak of a tiny rural school? If the Titans lose then fine, make fun of professionals, but give this treatment to 14- to 18-year-olds?" Nick, the story made me admire the players and coaches of Red Boiling Springs. No special qualities are required to play on a stacked winning team, no fortitude needed to take the field among superior teammates, knowing victory is likely. To keep trying after 40 straight losses is extraordinary -- compare such resolve to pro athletes who whine following the slightest minor setback. The kind of kids who still turn out for a high-school team that has little chance of winning, who still run hills in the August heat -- who *never give up* -- learn a lesson that will serve them well in life. Players and coaches of [Red Boiling Springs School](#) -- ESPN salutes you! Here's a quote for the locker room bulletin board: "Red Boiling Springs football exemplifies the larger purpose of sports: learning teamwork, fair play and determination. Anyone can walk an easy path. To refuse to quit in the face of great odds requires heart."

AFC West

Hey, you a running  
back? Then you are a star here.  
The Denver Broncos.

Forecast finish: 12-4

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Herm in mood? Let's hope.  
Keeps word only when in mood.  
Kansas City Chiefs.

Forecast finish: 9-7

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Brees blows out, Rivers  
flows in. Haiku or senryu?  
San Diego Bolts.

Forecast finish: 7-9

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Apparel still sells  
big. Guess kids don't know standings.  
The Oakland Raiders.

Forecast finish: 4-12

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**If Edvard Munch Had Gotten Weather Channel, His Most Famous Work Would Be Called *The Smile*:** Everyone's glad "The Scream" by Edvard Munch has been recovered. But this painting does not, as commonly assumed, express existential dread. It's a painting about the weather! Chemicals pumped into the sky by the 1883 explosion of the Krakatoa volcano colored sunsets around the world as red as blood. In an era before television and Internet people did not know a strange-looking atmosphere was about to happen. Munch was walking with two friends in Oslo and observed the sky turning blood-red. The painter was terrified by this unexpected omen: "I watched the flaming clouds over the fjord and the city ... I stood there shaking with fear and I felt a great unending scream ... I painted the picture, painted the clouds as real blood." Bad weather, not man's inhumanity to man, is what the funny guy in "The Scream" is screaming about.



If Edvard Munch were alive today, this painting would be about his cell phone bill.

**Brett Favre Vows to Play 20 More Years, Pass Andy Kelly in Record Books:** Brett Favre needs 25 touchdown throws to surpass Dan Marino as the NFL's all-time leader. Even if he takes the NFL mark, Favre will have thrown only about half as many touchdowns passes as Andy Kelly of the Arena Football League's Utah Blaze, whose 767 career TD passes towers over Marino's 420. TMQ assumes that if high school, college and pro are combined, Andy Kelly has thrown more touchdown passes than any other member of genus *Homo*. If any reader has the exact career total for Kelly, send it to me using the address at Reader Animadversion.

NFC East

"Sopranos" ending,  
but Jersey still has G-Men.  
Jersey/A Giants.

Forecast finish: 11-5

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Tom Cruise at QB,  
team trains at Six Flags. Redskins  
branded toothpaste next?

Forecast finish: 11-5

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T.O. gone, focus  
back where belongs: on cheer-babes.  
The Philly Eagles.

Forecast finish: 10-6

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Terrell, Parcels: the  
Kramer vs. Kramer team.  
Them Dallas Cowboys.

Forecast finish: 6-10

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**The Rigors of the New York Publishing Life:** Months ago I received from an acquaintance in New York publishing an e-mail that ended, "Have a great weekend." The e-mail was sent Thursday afternoon. I saved it, planning to do an item on the exhausting regime of New York publishing life. Then last week I received another e-mail from a prominent figure in New York publishing, ending, "Have a good weekend." The e-mail was sent Wednesday morning.

**TMQ Fashion Tips:** Want to leave J-Lo, P-Diddy and L-Dopa in your stylistic dust? Now you can spend perfectly good money on ESPN TMQ [hats](#) and [T-shirts](#) featuring the new column logo. The hat is especially cool with logo in front and Tuesday Morning Quarterback stitched onto the side. And OK, so there is no celeb nicknamed L-Dopa, but there should be. (L-dopa is 3,4-dihydroxy-L-phenylalanine, used to treat Parkinson's disease; Arvid Carlsson and William Knowles won Nobel prizes for aspects of its discovery.)

**Television Outsourcing Begins:** The Wall Street Journal reported that MyNetworkTV, the new channel devoted to cheesy soap operas, is buying scripts from telenovela producers in Mexico and simply translating the scripts into English.

NFC North

For them, 3-0  
considered high-scoring game.  
The Chicago Bears.

Forecast finish: 9-7

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Favre stumble on his  
victory lap? Could happen.  
The Green Bay Packers.

Forecast finish: 7-9

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Forget the trucker hats, the cool celebs will soon be wearing a TMQ hat.

All-novice coaching  
staff; owner new on job, too.  
Minnesota Vikings.

Forecast finish: 6-10

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Matt Millen in charge?  
Like Paris running Hilton.  
The Detroit Lions.

Forecast finish: 2-14

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**Journalists Decry Lack of Hurricanes:** Don't you sense the media are disappointed there have been no deadly hurricanes this season? Especially after all those reports last year claiming 2005 hurricane incidence proved an artificial greenhouse effect. (The scientific case for greenhouse gases regulation is [now strong](#), but hurricane incidence varies randomly; no one year proves anything.) Friday evening, as the remnant of Ernesto crossed the Carolinas, CBS Radio News led with a correspondent on the scene who breathlessly shouted into her mike, "The wind sure feels like more than 45 miles per hour!" My guess is that if the wind gauge said 45, then the winds were not, in fact, more than 45 mph. You could hear the disappointment in the correspondent's voice. Television loves hurricanes because they produce dramatic visuals that keep viewers glued to the tube. This season has been such a letdown! Maybe CNN and Fox will advocate more greenhouse gas emissions in hopes of increasing the number of future hurricanes.

**Magazine Calls Date with Pit Bull Sexy:** Annually TMQ chortles over the "What's Sexy Now" issue of InStyle magazine, which appears each September. The new "What's Sexy Now" issue crash-lands on newsstands at 606 pages -- the *Collected Plays of Henrik Ibsen* is 510 pages -- with four-fifths of the page count being advertising. People pay \$6 to purchase InStyle, and lord knows how much in gasoline to drag its mass around, in order to flip through ads. Paying to look at ads: only in America!

The annual "What's Sexy Now" issue attempts to determine, using the time-tested method of interviews with celebrities, what, at this exact moment in human history, is sexy. A few years ago, InStyle came to the counterintuitive conclusion that beautiful naked women are sexy. In another recent year, the magazine discerned gloom among celebrities and concluded that nothing was sexy. This year's verdict? It was "empowering" for Eva Longoria to wear a revealing bathing suit to the MTV Video Music Awards last year. Next, "black is sexiest when it envelopes entire objects." Jessica Biel is sexy because she is "playful but not frivolous." Biel's ideal romantic outing, InStyle informs us, would be a beach picnic with "Tina, her pit bull puppy." (It's left unclear whether Tina would be Biel's date.) Hugh Laurie likes to have sex in hotels because this allows "a chance to reinvent oneself in a new setting." Have *you* ever reinvented yourself in a hotel?

Amy Adams declares "there's a sexiness to the unknown," so perhaps she is aroused by thinking of distant galaxies. Blindfolded



If you want to woo Jessica,  
you'd better be able to catch  
a Frisbee in your mouth.

and gagged is sexy, but only if the necessary toys are bought at the ultra-expensive Kiki de Montparnasse boutique in Manhattan. Rosario Dawson comes to the counterintuitive conclusion that "passion is sexy." Kanye West thinks it would be sexy to have your name mentioned in the Bible. (This means Kezia and Kadmiel are sexy, but not Kanye.) Tiger Woods is the sexiest athlete, Angelina Jolie the sexist woman and Maroon 5 the sexiest band, InStyle concludes. Apparently the really sexy thing about Maroon 5 is that they do not produce any music.

NFC South

Cats' playbook: Smith right,  
Smith left, Smith over middle.  
The N.C. Panthers.

Forecast finish: 11-5

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Gruden aging fast:  
Should draft Ponce de León.  
City of Tampa.

Forecast finish: 10-6

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Move over Cowboys:  
This now America's team.  
The New Orleans Saints.

Forecast finish: 8-8

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Mora on cell on  
sideline; talking to Joe Horn?  
Atlanta Falcons.

Forecast finish: 6-10

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**Clang! Clang! Clang!** LeBron James, Carmelo Anthony, Dwyane Wade, Joe Johnson and Chris Paul combined to shoot 5-of-20 from the 3-point line as the United States lost to Greece, the third consecutive international flameout for a stacked American roster. Of course, NBA players are at a disadvantage in international games: Traveling is not legal, for example. The larger key makes it harder to barrel down the lane out of control until you slam into someone and draw the foul. Differences in rules and styles cause coordinated offensive plays to be essential in international games, and most NBA stars refuse to do anything but go one-on-one; many haven't run a back-pick since high school.

What struck TMQ about the coverage was that every story emphasized Greece won despite having no NBA players on its roster. Greece won *because* it had no NBA players on its roster! As Michael Wilbon of the Washington Post noted, while the Greek players showed teamwork and executed complex plays, the NBA guys on the U.S. side spent the contest strutting and pointing at themselves. The culture of shoe contracts and strut-oriented AAU basketball is ruining the American version of the sport, Wilbon asserted; TMQ cries, "Here here!" Let me add this thought. Once the United States [dominated international basketball](#); our recent decline has coincided all but

exactly with the decision to allow NBA players on U.S. Olympic and international-tournament teams. Obvious solution? Get rid of the NBA showoffs and go back to collegians. TMQ thinks the dozen best college basketball players of the United States, given a decent amount of practice time, would have beaten Greece. The NBA guys seemed not to have a clue what they were up against, since the Greeks used a tactic that is banned in the NBA: They performed as a team.

NFC West

Believe played Super  
Bowl 11 on 18.  
Seattle Seahawks.

Forecast finish: 11-5

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Good news -- all seats sold!  
Bad news -- crowd sees Cardinals!  
AZ Cactus Wrens.

Forecast finish: 8-8

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"Greatest Show on Turf"  
now "Show That Occurs on Turf."  
The St. Louis Rams.

Forecast finish: 4-12

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May be league's worst team:  
How the mighty have fallen.  
The S.F. Niners.

Forecast finish: 4-12

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**Obscure College Score of the Week:** Manchester 26, Tri-State 22. Located in Angola, Ind., Tri-State University "features Zollner Golf Course, a top-ranked 18-hole course, available to students right on campus." In TMQ's experience, virtually every college and university in the United States boasts of doing well in the influential annual U.S. News rankings -- though it cannot be that *every school* places highly. Tri-State proclaims, "For the third consecutive year, Tri-State University has been ranked among the top 50 comprehensive colleges in the Midwest by U.S. News." The "comprehensive colleges in the Midwest" category contains 52 listings.

**Obscure College Score of the Week No 2:** Central Missouri State University 78, Lincoln on Missouri 0. Ahead 59-0 at the start of the fourth quarter, Central Missouri nonetheless [kept passing the ball](#) in a frantic attempt to run up the score. Hey, CMSU coach Willie Fritz -- you should be ashamed of teaching your players such bad sportsmanship. [Here](#) you can listen to the Central Missouri marching band play the school fight song, "Go Mules."

**Reader Animadversion:** Got a complaint or a deeply held grievance? Write me at [TMQ\\_ESPN@yahoo.com](mailto:TMQ_ESPN@yahoo.com). Include your real name and the name of your hometown, and I may quote you by name unless you instruct me otherwise. Note: Giving your hometown improves your odds of being quoted.

**Next Week:** During the preseason, Tuesday Morning Quarterback uses bland "vanilla" items to confuse scouts from other sports columns. Next week the season starts for real, and I'll open up the playbook -- multiple-formation grammatical structures (you should see the sentence diagrams!) and adjectives that come at you from all directions.

**Monday, September 11, 2006**

**Updated: September 13, 8:38 PM ET**

Follow the Monday money

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By Gregg Easterbrook

Man, let's hope you enjoyed that first-of-a-kind Monday Night Football doubleheader on ESPN. Airing those games cost ESPN only \$129 million. And that's just for the rights fees. Cameras, techies and announcers are extra: ESPN had about 150 production personnel at each game. Typically, prime-time network programming costs a couple million dollars an hour. This year, ESPN is paying \$1.1 billion for the Monday Night Football package, which works out to \$65 million per contest and about \$20 million per hour. Ten times the normal cost of prime-time programming. Sure hope you liked those games!

All rights fees shot up in the new round of NFL network contracts in effect this season, reflecting the incredible popularity of professional football. For television broadcast rights, the NFL now gets about \$3.7 billion annually from ESPN, CBS, Fox, NBC and DirecTV (which holds the odious monopoly on the wonderful NFL Sunday Ticket), plus advertising income from the league's upcoming self-published games on NFL Network, plus additional millions for radio and cell phone broadcast rights from Sirius and Sprint. Forty years ago, commentators were shocked when NBC and CBS agreed to pay about \$340 million (in today's dollars) per year to broadcast NFL games. Now the same rights are selling for considerably north of \$4 billion, a dozen times as much as a generation ago. This fall, just two weekends of games will bring the league the present-dollar value of all pro football broadcasting in 1966.

The way the latest NFL-NFLPA agreement works, for all intents and purposes, broadcast fees go directly to players. Ticket sales cover the clubs' expenses (coaching, facilities, overhead), and owners make their profit on everything left over (local radio rights, tie-in marketing, parking and food sales). Let's stop to consider what this means to the average NFL athlete. This season, average NFL pay -- monies actually received, not contract paper value -- will be somewhat more than \$1.7 million per gentleman. That's almost exactly the \$3.7 billion in broadcast rights fees, divided by roughly 2,000 NFL players on rosters or on injured reserve.

Now think about the amount the typical NFL player will earn this year *just from ESPN*. Ready? An average of \$550,000 per player. That's the amount ESPN is putting in the average NFL player's purse for the 2006 season, and for seasons to come. From ESPN directly to you, dear NFL player: \$550,000. The sum works out to \$32,000 per Monday Night Football game. If you are an NFL player, every time you tune in Monday Night Football this season, bear in mind ESPN is sending you \$32,000 worth of thanks. The next-highest rights fee on the landscape works out to about \$12,000 from CBS to each NFL player for each game the Columbia Broadcasting System airs. So guys, ESPN is being almost three times as nice to you and your families as CBS! Remember this when interview requests come in.

In other football news, often TMQ approves of going for it on fourth-and-short. The situation is different within likely field goal range, in which case my rule becomes: Kick Early, Go For It Late. Through the first three quarters, usually it's best to put three points on the board. (Exception: If way behind, gamble early.) Once the fourth quarter is reached, when the endgame is clear and the coach knows how many points are needed to take the lead or ice the lead, then go for it. Many's the coach who went for the first down in likely field goal range in the first three quarters, then by the fourth

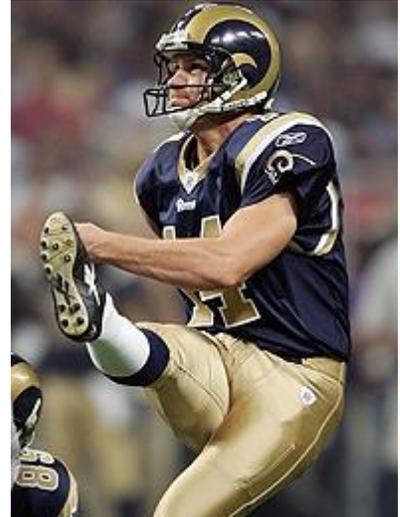
quarter really, really wished he had sent in the kicker. Field goals are not letdowns or wimpy plays. Field goals are critical: In 2005, one in four NFL games was decided by three or fewer points.

Never was TMQ's law of Kick Early, Go For It Late on better display than Sunday. Leading Denver 9-0 in the second quarter, St. Louis faced fourth-and-3 on the Broncos' 33. Scott Linehan sent in Jeff Wilkins, whose three points proved essential in the fourth-quarter dynamic of the Rams' victory. Trailing Detroit 3-0, NFC defending champion Seattle faced fourth-and-goal on the Lions' 2 in the second quarter. Mike Holmgren sent in Josh Brown, whose three points proved the game's margin of victory. Had it been the fourth quarter, either team might have been advised to gamble. Because it wasn't the fourth quarter, Kick Early, Go For It Late ruled.

Now for the flip side. Leading New England 17-7 early in the third quarter, Buffalo faced fourth-and-1 on the Patriots' 7. A gamble here is surely attractive, as success would position the Bills for a commanding lead. But it's still early in the third quarter, and a 20-7 lead sounds awfully good. Equally important, Buffalo had been controlling play; a missed gamble might change that. As the Bills reached this decision point, my son Grant immediately said, "They should kick; 20-7 is a great lead, but if they miss the first down, New England will get the momentum and make them pay." Buffalo gambled and missed; the Patriots responded with a 93-yard touchdown drive that was pure momentum. In fact, rarely has momentum so swung. To the point of the fourth-down try, Buffalo had gained 250 yards while holding New England to 109 yards; for the remainder of the contest, New England gained 210 yards while holding Buffalo to minus-10 yards. New England won 19-17. As the clock showed all-naughts, Bills faithful really, really wished the team had simply booted a field goal.

Should Kick Early, Go For It Late be waived when a team reaches the goal line? In an upcoming column, I'll look at the data collected by David Romer of the University of California at Berkeley, whose studies maintain NFL teams almost always should go for the touchdown on fourth down at the opponent's 1- or 2-yard line.

In other football news, before Sunday's Arizona-San Francisco contest, many Cardinals players experienced anxiety attacks and had to receive counseling from a psychologist. It seems Cardinals players were disoriented and frightened to look up and see the home stands full of people.



Three in the hand is worth six in the -- no, Reggie Bush fouls that up.

And in still more news, a just-out football book contends Tuesday Morning Quarterback is wrong about the blitz. See below. Note to ESPN copy editors: The phrase "Tuesday Morning Quarterback is wrong" is strictly a hypothetical, does not require fact checking and will not be repeated.

**Stats of the Week:** The Oakland Raiders had as many sacks (9) and punts (9) as first downs (9).

**Stats of the Week No. 2:** The Baltimore defense outscored the Tampa Bay offense.

**Stats of the Week No. 3:** David Carr has been sacked 213 times in 60 career starts, an average of four sacks per start.

**Stats of the Week No. 4:** The Falcons outrushed the Panthers by 187 yards -- in Carolina.

**Stats of the Week No. 5:** The Ravens outrushed the Buccaneers by 77 yards -- in Tampa.

**Stats of the Week No. 6:** The Saints outrushed the Browns by 65 yards -- in Cleveland.

**Stats of the Week No. 7:** The Eagles outrushed the Texans by 60 yards -- in Houston. (Yes, that says "the Eagles outrushed.")

**Stats of the Week No. 8:** Someone named Rex Grossman significantly outperformed Brett Favre.

**Stats of the Week No. 9:** Stretching back to last season, Pittsburgh has won nine consecutive games.

**Stats of the Week No. 10:** Before that streak started, Pittsburgh lost three consecutive games.

**Cheerleader of the Week:** No NFL cheer squad disrobes with more enthusiasm than the Philadelphia Eagles cheerleaders. Those who click on "cheerleaders" at the Eagles' Web site are greeted by [this screen](#) that cautions of "age-appropriate content." Thus guaranteeing everyone will click "continue"! The Eagles' cutting-edge cheerleaders lingerie calendar may be purchased [here](#). The season's first Cheerleader of the Week is [Janet](#), a real estate agent who minored in psychology, which means your lines will not work on her. Janet's team bio says that if she could take only one item to a desert island, it would be a treadmill. Now that's the cheer-babe spirit! Note: One of the questions on the Eagles cheerleaders bio pages is, "What can you never say no to?" The most common answer is "Chocolate." Strangely, not a one of the cheerleaders responds, "Football columnists."

**Sweet Play of the Week:** With two picks in the first round of the 2006 draft, Eric "I Was a Teenage Coach" Mangini went offensive line, offensive line, and it's already paying dividends. Score tied with 2:15 remaining, Jersey/B on the Tennessee 12, Chad Pennington had perfect pass protection as he scanned the field and found Chris Baker for the winning touchdown.



Fergie performed at the Cardinals' home opener -- but she's celebrating! That will be 15 yards, young lady.



An hour on the treadmill or an hour mooning with TMQ? Unfortunately, it's an easy call for Janet.

**Sweet Play of the Week No. 2:** Arizona leading San Francisco 14-7, the Cards faced second-and-goal on the Niners 6. Play-fake, and TMQ counted one-thousand 1, one-thousand 2, one-thousand 3, one-thousand 4, one-thousand 5, one-thousand 6, one-thousand 7 before Kurt Warner casually tossed a touchdown pass to Anquan Boldin. Blocking in Arizona!

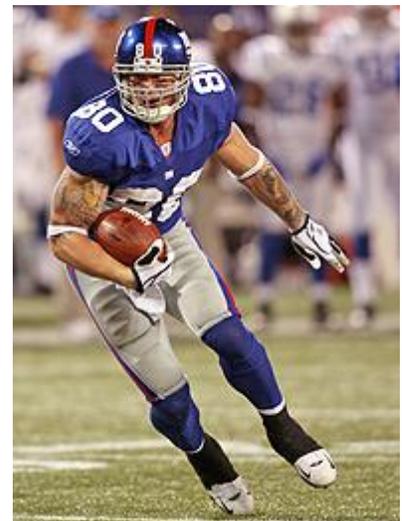
**Sweet Play of the Week No. 3:** Game scoreless, Pittsburgh goes for it on fourth-and-1 on the Miami 39. (Thank goodness no Preposterous Punt -- one reason the Steelers are champs is that they do not launch mincing fraidy-cat punts in these situations.) Charlie Batch fakes the fullback belly, then shifts the ball to his left hand to quick-flip to Willie Parker running left; 4 yards and the first down, and the Steelers record the game's first touchdown on the possession. The switch-hands-flip play on fourth-and-1 -- maybe it has a name in Steelers' nomenclature -- originally was installed in Pittsburgh by former offensive coordinator Mike Mularkey. It's interesting that Pittsburgh still uses the action although Mularkey no longer is employed by the Steelers; usually when a coach departs, anything that suggests his touch is erased. And where did Mularkey depart to? The Miami sideline, from which he watched his own play contribute to the Dolphins' defeat.

**Buck-Buck-Brawckkkkkkk:** Score tied at 6-all, Detroit faced fourth-and-4 on the Seattle 37 with 3:20 remaining. This is the Maroon Zone -- too far for a field goal try, too close to punt. Manly men go for it in the Maroon Zone! But wait, the game is being played indoors, meaning ideal field goal conditions. It's a 54-yard attempt, and Detroit's Jason Hanson has hit 27 figgies from 50 or more in his career. So try a field goal! Or go for it! Upset the NFC defending champs! Boom goes the punt into the end zone for a pathetic 17-yard net, and the Lions never touched the ball again, the Blue Men Group winning on the final play. Note to new Lions' coach Rod Marinelli: Victories must be seized; they do not come in the mail.

**Sour Play of the Week:** Indianapolis leading 26-21, the Giants had the ball on their 23, no timeouts, 57 seconds remaining. Eli Manning threw an 11-yard pass for the first down to Jeremy Shockey at the sidelines. But Shockey didn't step out, rather, turned back toward the field and dove forward for an extra yard. What a boneheaded play! The Giants got off just two more plays and the clock expired with the Giants at midfield; had Shockey simply stepped out of bounds, his team would have had at least one more snap.

**Sour Play of the Week No. 2:** The Texans ahead 7-0, Philadelphia faced first-and-10 on the Houston 42. Donovan McNabb ran a nice play-fake in which he hid the ball on his hip -- why don't more quarterbacks play-fake this way? Donte' Stallworth ran a streak. Texans safety C.C. Brown made the high school mistake of "looking into the backfield," trying to guess what McNabb was going to do, rather than covering his man. Stallworth caught the long touchdown while Brown stood like topiary covering no one. When you're the deep safety and someone from a pass-wacky team gets behind you, that is one sour play.

**Sour Play of the Week No. 3:** Baltimore leading the Bucs 20-0 late in the third quarter, the Nevermores faced third-and-10 on their own 6; a stop here was essential for Tampa to have hope. Baltimore play-faked, and tight end Daniel Wilcox ran a short crossing pattern; Tampa safety Jermaine Phillips not only bit on the play-fake (it's third-and-10!) but made the high school mistake of "looking into the backfield," trying to guess what Baltimore quarterback Steve McNair was going



The tight end position has become critical to an offense.

to do, rather than covering his man. Wilcox caught for 35 yards while Phillips stood like topiary covering no one. By the time Tampa got the ball again, it was too late.

**Oh Ye Mortals, Trifle Not with the Football Gods:** Few football-game scenes are more ridiculous than when a defender dances and struts after a routine play. On Sunday in the Texans-Eagles game, David Carr simply slipped and fell down; Philadelphia defender Trent Cole one-hand-touched Carr to end the play. Cole then jumped up and danced as if he'd just won the Heisman Trophy. Excessive defender dancing may tempt the football gods to exact vengeance. In the first Monday Night Football game, early on Troy Williamson of Minnesota beat Carlos Rogers of Washington, then dropped what would have been a long touchdown pass. Rogers jumped up and danced and strutted, pointing to himself -- as if he'd just done something magnificent, rather than been beaten and the beneficiary of good fortune. Skies darkened and lighting flashed above my house as the football gods signaled their displeasure with this rodomontade.

Later in the game Marcus Robinson badly beat Rogers for a touchdown reception, exacting the penalty. Tactics note: On the Robinson touchdown, Minnesota faced third-and-5 on the Washington 20. The Redskins rushed four, dropping seven into coverage, with both safeties in standard Cover 2 dropping deep. The Vikings sent out four receivers. Yet with seven to cover four, Robinson was singled on Rogers in the corner of the end zone. Both Washington safeties stood in the center of the field like topiary, covering no one.

**They Knew Too Much -- and Knew It Too Soon:** Home fans were booing loudly in the third quarter at Reliant Stadium as the Moo Cows yet again looked clueless on offense. Don't you think cell phones had something to do with the boos? [ESPN](#) and Sprint now sell cell phones that transmit live data on games in progress. So, the Houston crowd not only knew the home team looked awful, they knew Reggie Bush was having a spectacular debut for New Orleans. And they knew they could have been watching Bush.

### **Stop Me Before I Start the Stop Me Before I Blitz Again Item**

**Again!** Game scoreless in the second quarter, the defending champion Steelers face third-and-2 on the Marine Mammals' 27. Here comes the blitz -- and 27-yard touchdown pass to the unknown Nate Washington from Tiffin University. Later, it's Pittsburgh 14, Miami 10, the Dolphins facing third-and-7 on their own 23. Here comes the blitz -- and 52-yard completion to Marty Booker, setting up a Miami touchdown. Yes, the blitz sometimes works: a Jacksonville six-blitz on third-and-10 in the fourth quarter forced Drew Bledsoe into a killer intentional grounding. But the blitz tactic backfires pretty regularly; more below.

**Stop Me Before I Blitz Again (Manning Brothers Edition)!** Hey, Manning sure looked good at quarterback on Sunday night! (I'm just tossing out that line in case somebody hasn't already used it.) Big brother Manning *loves* it when defenses blitz. His whole game boils down to "Please Brer Wolf, don't throw me into that blitz patch!" Yet repeatedly, the Giants did just what Peyton wanted and blitzed him. Indianapolis 16, Jersey/A 14 at the start of the fourth quarter; six-man Giants blitz, 20-yard completion plus a penalty sets up the Lucky Charms for a short touchdown run. Peyton's touchdown pass to Dallas Clark also came against a big blitz. In contrast, with five minutes remaining and Indianapolis facing third-and-11, the Giants did not blitz, which seemed to confuse



Some parts of the Redskins' organization went all-out at FedEx Field on Monday Night Football; it just wasn't the team.

Peyton; incompleteness. Eli knows his bro -- why didn't he tell Giants coaches not to blitz Peyton? Aesthetics note: the touchdown to Clark was an unusually fun-looking play. Indianapolis faced third-and-goal on the Jersey/A 2. Play-fake rollout by Indy, zone blitz by the G-Men. Peyton sprinted all the way back to the 17-yard line -- it looked as though he was going to run out of the building -- then threw for a touchdown to Clark, who was covered by defensive end Michael Strahan.

**Stop Me Before I Blitz Again (Run Blitz Edition)!** Although passing-downs blitzing gets all the attention, there are run blitzes -- defensive calls in which linebackers shoot gaps at the snap, aiming not for the quarterback but to drop the runner in the backfield. Run blitzing has the same Achilles' heel as pass blitzing: It'd better work or else. Score tied at 3, Cincinnati facing third-and-1, Kansas City coaches called a seven-man run blitz. The linebackers shot into the backfield and missed Rudi Johnson, who went 22 yards for the touchdown, setting in motion another big Sunday loss by a home team with a big rep.

**Preposterous Punt Avoided!** Reader Mike Skelly of Erie, Pa., notes that as Pittsburgh lined up for its play on that fourth-and-1 on the Miami 39, John Madden opined, "I don't think the Steelers should go for it in this type of game, they should punt." This is the Maroon Zone -- too far for a field goal try, too close to punt. In the Maroon Zone, manly men go for it! A punt most likely would have rolled into the end zone for a net of 19 yards in field position for Pittsburgh; the successful fourth-down run set up a touchdown. Skelly offers this haiku,

Madden fraidy-cat  
in the Maroon Zone. Madden  
should read TMQ.

**On Page 1, Frey Fools a Major Publisher:** Friday, Random House announced that buyers of the hardcover of James Frey's fabricated memoir "A Million Little Pieces" could receive a refund by returning the original of page 163, a page arbitrarily chosen. Personally, I preferred page 105. That's the page on which Frey rescues Jennifer Aniston from a burning building, convenes a round of Middle East peace talks and discovers radium. If you want a refund for Tuesday Morning Quarterback, you must return an original printout of the 2001 column announcing the Hal Rothman Award. TMQ is free. So a refund would be -- oh, forget it.

**They Should Have Had Themselves Processed Through the Atavachron:** Friday was also the 40th anniversary of the first broadcast of the first "Star Trek" serial, starring William Shatner and Leonard Nimoy. Many fan-made tributes are proliferating on the Web. Here's the script for mine:

CHEKHOV: Captain, amidst the incredible vastness of the galaxy, which is  $10^{18}$  kilometers across and 99.999999 percent void, we once again find ourselves directly in the path of another ship.

SCOTTY: The engines can't take any more!

KIRK: I haven't ordered you to push the engines till they fail. I'll do that later.

SULU: They're hailing us.



Brer Eli, please don't throw me into that blitz patch!

KIRK: On screen. And why can't we get NFL Sunday Ticket on screen? This is the year 2269, surely the DirecTV monopoly has expired by now.

[On the viewscreen, we see an old man with a long beard.]

FATHER TIME. Greetings, cast and crew. You can't hide from me in syndication.

SPOCK: Logically, I believe we are about to be confronted with our own mortality. And I say "logically" because whenever I say this, people assume I must be right.

KIRK: Raise shields! Fire phasers!

SPOCK: Our weapons are having no effect. And I cannot attempt a mind meld.

YEOMAN JANICE. I could offer you a tuna melt.

KIRK: Warp factor nine! (Enterprise jumps to warp speed.)

CHEKHOV: We're not getting away. In fact -- no matter how fast we go, Father Time just keeps gaining on us.

KIRK: We'll set course for the City on the Edge of Forever and transit the portal back to Earth in the year 1966. Then we'll have our youth again! Plus, we'll buy IBM and short AT&T.

SPOCK: Logically, returning to 1966 would force us to listen to Joni Mitchell.

KIRK: Then we'll go to Talos IV. The cerebrum-beings there will give us back our illusion of youth. That, and more!

SCOTTY: Our bodies are starting to fail! Our arteries are clogged, and our heart ventricles cannot take this stress!

KIRK: We'll travel to the Genesis Planet, where our cellular tissue will be restored! Or we'll ask the Organians to help us; they're omnipotent, plus they wear white robes, so you know they must be good guys.

SPOCK: Jim. We've always known mortality comes for everyone, Jim. Well, actually not for me, since I'm Vulcan.

KIRK: Starfleet will rescue us.

SPOCK: Jim. Starfleet never existed, Jim. This ship, our voyages -- they represent the lost youth of Baby Boomers. Episodes like "The City on the Edge of Forever" symbolize our generation's dream that there will be an actual place we can go to escape aging. Millions cling to "Star Trek" because it evokes a time of adolescence, promise and anticipation. But we're old now, and so are our fans. You saw the demographics for "Star Trek: Enterprise."

KIRK: We can't grow old. I don't believe in the no-win scenario!

SULU: Father Time is hailing us, captain.

FATHER TIME: Come with me. We'll have a nice glass of tranya and talk this out.

KIRK: Listen! This is about the human dream, the dream of tomorrow coming after today, the dream of standing atop a hill built of dreams and shouting for all creation to hear that we are what we dreamed we could become when we began to dream that we could dream of dreams. Do you understand what I'm trying to say?

SPOCK: No.

DOCTOR McCOY: [Enters.] Jim, it's time for your Zocor. And you don't want to be late for the shuffleboard tournament.

KIRK: Mr. Chekhov, sensors to maximum! Find our lost youth!

FATHER TIME: [To audience.] For those of you who were born after "Star Trek" and think it's funny how wrinkled or flabby the show's stars have grown -- just remember, I will come for you, too, and you too will be astonished how fast your lives went past.

SPOCK: [Puts hand on Kirk's temple.] Forget.

KIRK: Forget? Every year, it gets harder to remember!

**Preposterous Punt Not Avoided:** Reader Kevin Tlougan of Woodbury, Minn., notes that on the first possession of the season's first game, Miami punted in the Maroon Zone, booming a kick on fourth-and-5 from the Pittsburgh 44. "The first possession of the first game of the new NFL season ends with a Preposterous Punt. Is this an omen?" If so, it's an omen of bad football.

**Why Tactics Matter:** In their openers, two 2005 playoff teams -- Carolina and City of Tampa -- were destroyed on their own fields. The Ravens' defense played so well the Bucs' offense recorded negative-7 points. Carolina's defense "overpursued," and Atlanta seemed to be expecting that. Several nice Warrick Dunn and Michael Vick runs came when all Panthers' defenders went the same way, nobody stayed home and the Falcons' ball carrier cut back. Atlanta coaches must have seen Carolina overpursuit in film.

**This Fulfills My Obligation to Say Something About the Chicago-Green Bay Game:** The Bears had six defensive or special-teams return touchdowns in 2005, and after Sunday already have a return touchdown in 2006. This team is most dangerous when its offense is off the field! As for the Packers -- they were great in 1966. They were great in 1996. It's 2006.

Reader Kyle Kirchhevel of Jacksonville adds, "Brett Favre walked off Lambeau Field and up the tunnel before the game was over because his poor little ego couldn't handle shaking hands with the Bears who shut him out. When Randy Moss walked off a moment early in 2004 at Washington, he got incinerated by the sports press. Why is it OK for Favre to do what was wrong for Moss to do?" I did not see the ending of Packers-Bears -- it's hard to believe anyone but immediate family members was watching -- but if Favre did indeed walk off early to avoid shaking hands, he deserves a round of criticism. Favre is a first-ballot Hall of Famer, but he has been flattered too much by the sports media. Hard as it might seem for him to believe, the Packers' season is not about him personally.

**Professional Athletes Are Supposed To Run!** In the Baltimore-City of Tampa game, 340-pound Ravens defensive tackle Haloti Ngata caught a deflected-pass interception and ran 60 yards down the sideline before stepping out of bounds on the Bucs' 9. Ngata was not tackled, rather, simply stepped out of bounds, apparently exhausted from his efforts; the Ravens had to settle for a field goal. After the play, the television announcers gushed about how impressive it was that a 340-pound man could run so far. Ngata is a professional athlete! The announcers should have said that it was embarrassing that a highly paid professional athlete is in such poor shape he had to stop after running a mere 60 yards. Any NFL player, including any lineman, ought to be able to run a dozen such wind sprints back-to-back.



Bat Masterson rode the range too long. Sylvester Stallone didn't know when to quit. Brett Favre ...

**Don't Suggest She End by Saying, "Courage":** Edward R. Murrow had "good night and good luck"; Walter Cronkite had "and that's the way it is." What will Katie Couric's sign-off line be? CBS News is [asking for suggestions](#). My nominated Couric sign-off line: "Thanks for watching, and if the overnights aren't good, tomorrow's show will be completely different." Alternatively, "Thanks for watching, and sorry we did so many feature stories that we never got around to mentioning the news."

**Cosmic Thoughts -- Bummer Edition:** Recently, I was creeped out by this [supernova](#). Detected Feb. 18 by Swift, a satellite launched to look for gamma-ray bursts, the exploding star already was the 24th supernova discovered at that early point in 2006. As instruments improve, exploding stars appear more common than cosmologists had expected, and that's not the best news we might have heard. Coded GRB 060218, this star detonation began as a gamma-ray burst that lasted 33 minutes -- absolutely stunning because previous gamma-ray bursts from space have lasted a few seconds at the most. The gamma rays came from 470 million light-years away. That was discomfiting because strong gamma-ray bursts usually emanate from what astronomers call the "deep field," billions of light-years distant and thus billions of years back in the past. A distance of 470 million light-years means the GRB 060218 supernova happened 470 million years ago. That is ancient by human reckoning, but many cosmologists had been assuming the kind of extremely massive detonations thought to cause strong gamma-ray bursts occurred only in the misty eons immediately after the Big Bang. The working assumption was that since life appeared on Earth, there had been no stellar mega-explosion. Now we know there has.



Nature's weapon of mass destruction.

For several days as the giant dying star GRB 060218 collapsed, this single supernova shined brighter than all 100 billion other suns in its galaxy combined. The detonation was so inexpressibly luminous that, though 470 million light-years distant, it could be seen by telescopes on Earth. And not just fancy telescopes at the tops of mountains: A few days after the Swift satellite detected the gamma-ray surge, an amateur astronomer in the Netherlands sighted the forming supernova through a backyard telescope. The stellar coordinates hit the Web -- it was at RA: 03:21:39.71 Dec: +16:52:02.6 -- and soon amateur astronomers the world over were marveling at the glistening beacon from the cosmic past. This explosion released so much energy that it happened 470 million years ago yet the light could travel for that protracted period, plus pass through the gas and dust of roughly a hundred galaxies along the way, and *still illuminate mirrors of backyard telescopes on Earth*.

Now here's what creeped me out: had GRB 060218 happened in our galaxy, life on Earth would have ended Feb. 18.

Gamma rays are a deadly form of radiation. Routine gamma-ray bursts course through the Milky Way, our galaxy, all the time, and the threat from them appears small. Recently Krzysztof Stanek, a professor of astronomy at Ohio State and one of the hot names in astronomy -- reader Jim Yrkoski of Warsaw, Poland, notes I missed one "z" in Stanek's name the last time I cited him -- calculates that a regular supernova causing a routine gamma-ray burst would need to detonate within about 3,000 light-years of Earth to expose our world to enough radiation to cause a calamity. Only a small

portion of the Milky Way, and none of the larger universe beyond, is within 3,000 light-years of our world.

This does not rule out "nearby" gamma-ray bursts as causes of past extinctions. About 340,000 years ago, a supernova called Geminga exploded 180 light-years from Earth, which is much too close. Calculations suggest Geminga was bright enough to rival the full moon; our *Homo erectus* ancestors must have looked up on it in wonder. The Geminga supernova is believed to have blown off much of the ozone layer, exposing Earth to solar and cosmic radiation that killed many mammals, including many of those ancestors. Another supernova, Vela, about 1,500 light-years away, detonated 11,300 years ago. About the same time, several large mammals of North America and Eurasia fell extinct: among them, the woolly mammoth, the giant sloth and the glyptodon, an armadillo larger than a bear. There's a lively archeological debate about whether these extinctions were triggered by climate change or by people armed with new hunting tools such as bow and arrow. Maybe the extinctions were caused by the supernova bathing Earth in gamma rays.



Extinct, just like the Wing T.

At any rate, Vela and Geminga were normal supernovas that caused relatively mild gamma bombardments lasting just seconds. If a 33-minute, incredibly powerful gamma-ray burst similar to the one associated with GRB 060218 happened anywhere in the Milky Way or any nearby galaxy, Earth would be sterilized; any life that might exist on other planets in our galaxy and nearby galaxies also would end. Most likely, the gamma radiation from GRB 060218 ended all life in numerous galaxies near the explosion. After GRB 060218, a team of astronomers led by Andrew Fruchter of the Space Telescope Science Institute calculated that the class of extremely massive blue star that caused this mega-supernova [probably is not found in the Milky Way](#). That's some consolation. But February's ultimate supernova tells us nature has a doomsday weapon -- and that creeps me out.

Interstellar bonus: The [Swift satellite has a marketing slogan](#).

**Hidden Plays:** Hidden plays are ones that never make highlight reels but that stop or sustain drives. St. Louis leading heavily favored Denver 9-0 in the second quarter, the Broncos had third-and-1 on their 29. Denver play-faked hoping for the big gain, and instead Jake Plummer was sacked by Les Mouflons' Fakhir Brown for a 10-yard loss. Shortly thereafter, it was St. Louis 12, Denver 0. Plummer's back-to-back interceptions are what sports radio talked about, but those came late, when the cause was nearly lost. It was after the sack on third-and-1 that you felt St. Louis really could win the game.

**Food Should Have a Sense of Humor:** Peter Pan's "no sugar added" version contains more calories and fat per serving than regular Peter Pan peanut butter.

**Braylon Edwards -- the Next Charles Rogers?** Nothing makes a quarterback wince more than the well-thrown pass that caroms off a careless receiver for an interception; the pick is the receiver's fault but is charged against the quarterback. The Saints leading Cleveland 19-14, the Browns had first down on the New Orleans 45 at the two-minute mark. Charlie Frye threw it perfectly to Edwards, third overall choice of the 2005 draft. Edwards carelessly allowed the ball to carom off his hands; the deflection was intercepted by New Orleans, ending the game.

**Don't Miss This Story:** Rarely will you encounter a human-interest story as touching as [this one](#), summarized by Sean Coughlan of the BBC last week. Be sure to read the reader comments appended, from those who knew the late Harold and Olive Edwards. Imagine living out your days in a quiet English town running a store selling antiquarian books, tending your garden, arguing about adjectives, popping down to the pub and having this magnificent impact on another human life. And the pictures of Marina Aidova! Not only was she perfectly fetching as a child, she can still beam as an adult despite her childhood deprivation: Compare that to the millions who have been given everything and can only complain.

**How Long Until the Vikings Accept Escort-Agency Ads on Their Web Site?** Although Koren Robinson was waived by the Vikings after he was charged with multiple counts of drunken driving, Minnesota continues to offer his jersey for sale. Indeed, as reader Adam Palmer of Tulsa, Okla., notes, the Vikes will sell you a [Robinson youth jersey](#). Some role model!

**Sominex Presents the NFL Game of the Week:** Seattle 9, Detroit 6. Here are the drive results, starting with the victors': Blocked field goal, fumble, missed field goal, field goal, field goal, punt, punt, punt, punt, punt, field goal. For Detroit: field goal, punt, fumble, punt, punt, punt, missed field goal, field goal, punt. Offensive line note: the vaunted Hawks front five looked pretty normal without Steve Hutchinson.

**Four Books That Belong Near Your Remote:** As the football artificial universe resumes, Tuesday Morning Quarterback has armed himself with four annuals: the league's own NFL Record and Fact Book, the Pro Football Guide published by The Sporting News, KC Joyner's Scientific Football 2006 (he also writes for [ESPN Insider](#)) and Pro Football Prospectus by Aaron Schatz and the independent consortium called Football Outsiders. I commend all four to gridiron enthusiasts. The first two settle arguments, and they make for pleasant Sunday afternoon reading when your local network affiliate decides to show a pairing of cellar dwellers instead of the week's marquee game. Scientific Football offers more football data than you would have believed possible, and is an absolute must-have for anyone who believes sports, real or fantasy, is best understood by the numbers. Pro Football Prospectus offers hundreds of pages of Bill James-style analytical breakdowns. Although the stats are sometimes excessively fastidious -- the book's formulas predict the Vikings will win 5.9 games in 2006, for example -- if I could own only one book about the NFL, Pro Football Prospectus would be it.

But avast, ye mateys, what's this? The latest edition of Pro Football Prospectus contains an entire chapter analyzing whether Tuesday Morning Quarterback's "Stop Me Before I Blitz Again!" is correct. And -- this is hard to grasp -- the authors think I'm wrong.

TMQ has long contended blitzing is prone to backfire. Each year, I chart every down for a playoff weekend, and annually my charts show that offenses gain more yards and score more touchdowns against the blitz than against regular defense -- and that this holds even if you adjust for down and distance. Here is last season's [blitz analysis column](#). I found that offenses averaged 4.3 yards per play against conventional defense and 8.7 yards per play against the blitz and scored touchdowns on 2.6 percent of plays against conventional defense and on 6.7 percent of plays against the blitz; that conventional defense forced the offense to kick three times as often as blitzing forced a kick; and



Koren Robinson, youth role model!

that there was no difference between blitzing and conventional defense in terms of forcing turnovers.

Pro Football Prospectus objects to my playoff-weekend approach, calling four games too small a sample. One weekend of charting every play is the most I can stand! Schatz and his pals from Football Outsiders (who, in another of those historical-dialectic reversals, are rapidly becoming insiders) charted every 2005 NFL passing down, some 16,188 of them. Their conclusion: "Overall, [defensive] performance is the same whether the defense sends three, four, or five men after the quarterback. On a six-man blitz, the defense clearly has the upper hand. Send seven or eight across the line, and suddenly the offense is gaining more yards per pass." The finding appears to be that offenses can usually handle five rushers but that six rushers might overwhelm blocking, making the six-blitz the effective tactic; however, a seven- or eight-blitz means a receiver covered by no one, causing the mega-blitz to backfire. The book's advice to defensive coaches: Call the six-blitz.

Could I have been so wrong? Of course not, or I wouldn't be setting it up this way!

For all its prodigious charting, Pro Football Prospectus considered only passing plays. My annual analysis takes into account runs, as well, and a draw against the blitz can be a devastating play for the offense. The big difference between the sets of stats might be regular season versus playoffs. Pro Football Prospectus charts the regular season, in which many contests pit good teams against bad teams; I chart the playoffs, which pit good against good. Perhaps when a good defense blitzes a bad offense, the blitz works -- just as most tactics work when good teams play bad teams. In the postseason, when a good defense blitzes a good offense, the blitz backfires. Good offensive lines handle the extra pressure, and good quarterbacks get the ball out fast to the hot receiver.

If blitzing works better during the regular season than the playoffs, we'd expect to see the best teams blitz steadily less come January. And that is exactly what happened last season. During the regular season, the Steelers blitzed more than anyone else in the league -- Pat Kirwan of NFL.com calculated that Pittsburgh blitzed on 32 percent of its 2005 regular-season defensive snaps, versus the league average of about 15 percent blitzing. As the playoffs progressed, Pittsburgh backed away from the blitz, dropping into conventional defense. Against Cincinnati in the first round of the playoffs, the Steelers blitzed on 18 percent of Bengals plays; in the second round, Pittsburgh blitzed on 25 percent of Colts plays; in the AFC championship, Pittsburgh blitzed on 16 percent of Broncos plays; in the Super Bowl, the Steelers blitzed on 13 percent of Seahawks plays. That is to say -- on the day they won the NFL championship, the Steelers blitzed less than the league average. Pittsburgh *showed* blitz constantly in the playoffs but usually backed out, tricking opposition quarterbacks into expecting an uncovered hot receiver who was, instead, covered. Maybe the lesson to be learned from melding my stats with the Pro Football Prospectus analysis is: Once you get to the playoffs, blitz less.

Vince Lombardi, after all, called blitzing "the weapon of weaklings." Meanwhile, reader Darren Staley of Millers Creek, N.C., points out that the Stop Me Before I Blitz Again! viewpoint seems to be catching on. Gil Brandt recently wrote on NFL.com that "blitzing will be down this year, because teams don't want to subject themselves to allowing big plays." We'll see whether Gil is proven right, and remind me someday to tell you my Gil Brandt story from 1975. (It's true: I have a three-decades-old Brandt story!)

**Adventures in Officiating:** After the multiple zebra miscues of the playoffs, we have a new officiating uniform, but do we have new results? The offensive pass interference call against Tim Carter of the Giants with four minutes remaining Sunday, negating a first down and leading to the game-deciding interception on the next snap, looked bogus -- and I speak as someone who believes

offensive pass interference should be called more often. The Patriots were flagged for just one 5-yard infraction, although there were at least four plays on which a Patriots offensive lineman wrapped both arms around a Buffalo pass-rusher, and the Flying Elvii benefited from an extremely convenient inadvertent whistle that ended a play when a Buffalo runner had 50 yards of green grass between him and the end zone.

Meanwhile, the Bills were hit with seven penalties, including a ticky-tack nudge-in-the-back call that wiped out a fourth-quarter first down in New England territory and changed a scoring opportunity into a punt. Worst, it is outrageous that no flag flew when Cincinnati's Robert Geathers dove at Kansas City quarterback Trent Green while he was sliding. The feet-first-slide rule is unambiguous: "Whenever a runner declares himself down by sliding feet first on the ground, the ball is dead." Any contact constitutes unnecessary roughness. Geathers pile-driven into Green as he slide, and the pile-drive is itself illegal. Not only should flags have flown, Geathers should have been ejected. Instead, the officials were staring off into space.

Come on Mike Pereira, supervisor of NFL officials, your guys are messing up week in and week out. Maybe the league needs new blood in this department: Pereira is no Jerry Seeman, that's for sure. And maybe NFL officials -- who work part-time, unlike the full-time officials of other pro sports -- simply are not up to the task as weekend warriors. The National Football League is the richest sport. Wouldn't some funding for full-time officials be worth a try?

**Four Presidential Names in the Same Play:** Reader Jeff Miller of Columbus, Ohio, reports that during the Saints-Browns game, "The stadium announcer called a play as 'Bush is the ball carrier, tackled by Washington, McKinley and Jackson.'"

**Obscure College Score of the Week:** Massachusetts Maritime 19, MIT 0. The Massachusetts Institute of Technology has a football team? What, composed entirely of 5-7 guys with thick-rimmed glasses? It turns out the MIT football roster includes a [6-5, 268-pound tight end](#). This guy *goes to MIT*? And leave it to MIT to make its [athletic department](#) sound like some sort of classified defense installation.

**Obscure College Score of the Week No. 2:** Webber 13, Shorter 6. Located in Rome, Ga., Shorter College asks parents to make donations while their children are attending -- to expect parents to pay and donate simultaneously seems a little brassy even by the standards of contemporary college money obsession. Shorter's [honor code](#) runs a phenomenal 9,542 words. For those accused of violating the code, there is a 24-point trial procedure followed by a 14-point appeal procedure.

**The Revenge of the Cupcakes!** The big-deal unlimited-budget programs of the University of Colorado and Northwestern already have lost home games to Division I-AA clubs (Montana State and New Hampshire) they paid to come and be clobbered. Perennial cupcake Troy University, paid to travel to Tallahassee and be clobbered, instead was leading Florida State midway through the fourth quarter before running out of gas. The hapless University of Buffalo, which Auburn, Wisconsin and Boston College have hired to appear at their stadiums and be clobbered, took Bowling Green to triple overtime. And kudos to the Eastern Washington Eagles, a Division I-AA school hired by BCS pretender West Virginia so the Mountaineers could take the day off, for kicking a



The cupcake teams: Fear their wrath!

field goal that prevented West Virginia from boasting of a shutout. ([Here](#) the Mountaineers boast, anyway, claiming they "grounded" the Eagles, although it's a joke that a stacked team such as West Virginia is playing an overmatched I-AA club.) It's coming -- I can feel it -- the Revenge of the Cupcakes is in the air. College football's second echelon is tired of being hired to be clobbered. Sometime this season, a cupcake team is going to stage a major upset of a Top 25 school. Thus sayeth the football gods.

**Running Up the Score?** Reader Mary Sue Borst of Alexandria, Va., writes, "Watching the Penn State-Notre Dame game, I was appalled at the unsportsmanlike conduct of Charlie Weis and the Irish coaching staff. Late in the third quarter with Notre Dame up 27-3, Weis called a fake punt that set up another touchdown. NBC showed the Penn State sideline after the fake punt and humiliation was apparent on the faces of the players. Penn State may have lost the game, but still has dignity and class. Where is the class and sportsmanship on the part of Notre Dame?"

I winced when that fake punt started, too. The problem is that most college coaches and many high school coaches want to impress pollsters, and so have an incentive to run up the score. Polls are not a factor in the pros, which is a reason running up the score is rare there. Also in the pros, teams often play each other twice a year; or at least know they could see the opponent again soon, with most of its starters still on the field and still smarting from any bad sportsmanship. In high school and college, there is so much year-to-year personnel turnover that a coach knows the next time the teams meet, most opponents' starters will not be boiling over past poor sportsmanship. Here's your vengeance, Mary Sue -- Weis' call was bad tactics. If you have a fake punt, why waste it when ahead by 24? Now he can't call the play when he really needs it.

**Reader Animadversion:** Got a complaint or a deeply held grievance? Write me at [TMQ\\_ESPN@yahoo.com](mailto:TMQ_ESPN@yahoo.com). Include your real name and the name of your hometown and I might quote you by name unless you instruct me otherwise. Note: Giving your hometown improves your odds of being quoted.

**Next Week:** Paramount announces plans for the next "Star Trek" motion picture, "Where No Non-Gendered Individual Has Gone," in which Kirk and Spock travel through time to attend a Grateful Dead concert, then -- upon returning to the future -- find they have altered history and no longer qualify for Medicare.

**Wednesday, September 13, 2006**

TMQ Nation fires back

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By Gregg Easterbrook

Pro football's all-time leader for touchdown passes is Andy Kelly of the Arena League's Utah Blaze, who has thrown 768 -- versus 420 for NFL leader Dan Marino. So far no reader has been able to meet TMQ's challenge of figuring out how many total touchdowns Kelly has thrown in high school, college and the pros. Hey Andy Kelly -- you yourself know the answer, let me know! Surely, Andy, you have Google News set for your own name and must know I am pretty much the only sports columnist who is lauding you, so e-mail me your full career total at [TMQ\\_ESPN@yahoo.com](mailto:TMQ_ESPN@yahoo.com). Meanwhile **Ian Hutchinson** supposes, "Since the Arena League field is only 50 yards long, Kelly's total should be divided by two. That gives him 384 touchdown passes, short of Marino's mark. Then compare career passing yards: 61,361 yards for Marino, 39,948 yards for Kelly."

**Mark Sangin of Chicago** notes that of the 25 Pro Bowl cheerleaders this past February, two -- [Amy Day of Kansas City](#) and [Trina Mills of the Seattle Sea-Gals](#) -- had also been Tuesday Morning Quarterback Cheerleaders of the Week. How did he determine this? By looking up every 2005 Cheerleader of the Week. Mark -- you were using your time wisely. **Jeff Urban of Boston** wonders why fans get to vote on the Pro Bowl players, but not on the [Pro Bowl cheerleaders](#). Surely this would lend spice to fantasy leagues! Meanwhile **Michael of Los Angeles** notes, "Every time I read your column, it seems my wife walks by at the point with the photo of the cheerleader." Where, he asks, is the Tuesday Morning Quarterback boss button? **Stephen Kinnell of Columbus, Ohio** says he doesn't like the cheesecake pictures and requests "a Crème Brûlée instead perhaps?" **Christine Karnisky of Rochester, N.Y.** reports, "In an effort to increase productivity we can no longer view ESPN.com at the office. Each week my husband takes the time to cut and paste TMQ in its entirety into an e-mail so I don't miss a word. This is also helpful as reading TMQ from an e-mail isn't as obvious as reading it from the website." Tuesday Morning Quarterback converted into e-mails? No wonder the Internet has been slow lately.

[Yesterday's column](#) noted that when Brett Favre left the Packers-Bears game a moment before it ended, he was not slammed in the sports press, as Randy Moss was once slammed for leaving a loss a moment early. **Rabbi Dan Plotkin of St. Louis** writes, "Moss left the game when the Vikes still had a slight chance to win. Favre left when the score was 26-0 with no opportunity to get the ball back, a vast difference especially since there is no rule (that I know of) requiring players to stay out and shake hands."

I've been asking ESPN to create some sort of e-mail sign-up to alert readers when the column posts. Apparently I am weeks behind in understanding tech trends -- you can already do this using the [ESPN RSS utility](#). A reader notes in haiku:

*I know the minute  
the TMQ column posts.  
Thanks, RSS feed.*

-- **Jessica Gribble, Boulder, Colo.**

The collegiate cupcake teams are angry, fear their wrath! Tuesday Morning Quarterback continues to predict there will be a monster upset this season in which a lesser team hired to come get clobbered instead defeats a football-factory host. Troy at Nebraska on Sept. 23, perhaps?

Meanwhile **Alysia Kravitz Loshbaugh of New Orleans** notes that Air Force, paid \$850,000 to travel to Knoxville and get clobbered by the University of Tennessee, instead came within a two-point try of victory. **Tony Bender of Missouri City, Texas** notes Illinois State came within a deuce of upsetting factory school Kansas State. **Scot of Portland, Ore.** notes that the I-AA Portland State Vikings upset I-A New Mexico. And **Gbenga Ajilore of Toledo, Ohio** notes that although Bowling Green has a better football tradition than everyone's favorite cupcake of the moment, the University of Buffalo, the reason these teams met last weekend is that they are in the same conference, the MAC East.

Many Irish faithful objected to my item suggesting Notre Dame running a fake punt when leading Penn State 27-3 was poor sportsmanship. **Heidi Freni of San Jose, Calif.** noted that during the opening weekend of college football, Texas and USC played cupcakes, while Notre Dame faced a strong team in Georgia Tech. This meant Charlie Weis needed a big margin of victory in his second outing to impress pollsters. **Josh Zickefoose of Findlay, Ohio** explains that Weis did not call the fake punt; it was called on the field: "Some coaches install 'automatics,' audibles that are automatic in response to a defensive formation. When Notre Dame lined up to punt, Penn State overloaded the outsides of the Irish formation, leaving the middle open. When a team lines up like this, a player on the punt team, probably the up-back, calls the automatic. The long snapper makes the adjustment, snapping to the up-back, who goes straight up the middle through the opening. Charlie Weis cannot be faulted for Penn State leaving a gaping hole in their D-line!"

Over the winter I got a lot of mail defending academics Cade Massey and Richard Thaler, whose [National Bureau of Economic Research paper](#) contends the NFL draft system actually penalizes losing teams by giving them high picks. High draft picks don't perform notably better than low ones, Massey and Thaler contend, but cost so much more to sign that high draft picks backfire in salary cap terms. My objection to this thesis is -- then how come *no one* in the NFL trades high draft picks even-up for low ones? Economics assumes most people and organizations are "rational actors." In this case, that means NFL general managers would trade high picks for low picks if they perceived this to be in their interests. It cannot be that low draft picks are actually worth more than high picks, yet not a single one of 32 NFL teams has realized this. Massey and Thaler don't address public relations, and any business executive will tell you public relations is a tangible good with monetary value. High draft picks make the fans of losing teams excited about the future and willing to buy tickets for the upcoming season; this public relations consideration is missing from the Massey-Thaler paper. Some readers compared the Massey-Thaler thesis to breakthrough statistical analyses like those described in the fun book "Moneyball." But it's not the same. Initially, only Oakland had the moneyball concept; but then everyone began to use it. (In business terms, moneyball was initially intellectual property, then was commoditized.) Massey-Thaler's thinking is the reverse -- everyone already knows the core ideas, and no one uses them!

Anyway here is **Josh Zacharias of New York**: "What Thaler/Massey have done is illuminate a possible reason why general managers of the NFL initially appear to be rational actors, but are not. Granted, you might be right about the value of the media/fan outrage counteracting some of this, but if a GM believes Thaler/Massey's implication to be correct, it is up to that GM to change fan perspective so that trading down in a round would not draw outrage. Or to educate fans that trading your high pick for several later picks might be the best way to build a winning team. I would argue that Bill Belichick is so well regarded in New England right now that if he had a top 10 pick and traded it straight up for a lower pick in the first round using Thaler/Massey as his explanation, he would probably not be lambasted. Certainly if he traded a top 10 pick for several lower picks, fans

might approve. While economics does assume most people are rational, it also finds many instances of inefficient real-world behavior -- and this paper is a fine example of that."

**Kevin Lehde of Raleigh, N.C.**, a high school football official, notes the new National Federation of High Schools rulebook bans the "fumblerooski," in which a team deliberately places the ball on the ground, hoping the defense will lose track of where the ball is. The reason? Because this trick play often tricks the officials, leading to an inadvertent whistle -- though coaches planning to call a trick play may describe the play to officials before the game. Lehde notes, "This means we now have a rule that was instituted as a direct result of the perceived incompetence of the officials calling the game! 'Our officials can't enforce the rules correctly, so let's alter the rules to reduce officiating mistakes,' says the rules committee. Who do they think we are, U.S.-Mexico border guards?"

Finally, yesterday TMQ asked why the Minnesota Vikings' Web site was selling a youth version of the Koren Robinson jersey -- in addition to no longer being with the Vikings, Robinson is hardly what you'd call a role model. **Minna Hong of St. Paul, Minn.** notes that as of Tuesday evening, the [Robinson youth jersey link](#) took you to a "product unavailable" message.

**Monday, September 18, 2006**

**Updated: September 19, 6:58 PM ET**

The five-month NFL forecast

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By Gregg Easterbrook

Recently I forecast each NFL team's final record, bearing in mind this column's motto: All Predictions Wrong or Your Money Back. See, TMQ is free. So if one of my predictions was actually correct you would receive -- oh, never mind.

Now, for my off-price generic forecasts. First, I predict that every NFL team will end the 2006 season with the same record as it did in 2005. Obviously this won't be right, but will it be closer than the countless pseudo-scientific forecasts floating around? I bet if you analyzed the last, say, 20 years, endlessly predicting every team would finish with the same record as the previous season would do you better than actually thinking about your prediction.

Next, let me issue a generic final score prediction: Home Team 20, Visiting Team 17. This score happened four times in 2005, representing the most common generic outcome. I predict Home Team 20, Visiting Team 17 will happen more than any other outcome in 2006. This forecasting formula has the virtue that you don't need incredible insider information -- or even need to know who's playing.

Next let me offer my off-price ultra-generic private-label prediction: Home Team Wins. The home team won 59 percent of the time in 2005. Many paid professional football pundits, gentlemen who yak about the NFL for a living, barely bested 59 percent in their 2005 picks: Jay Novacek of MSNBC came in at 63 percent, for instance. Simply pick the home team in every contest and you are likely to be right about six times out of 10. I'll offer Home Team Wins even though, so far this season, the home team is just 17-15. The Law of Large Numbers says this effect will wash out and the home team will assert itself as the season progresses.

Now to my Super Bowl pick. In each of its previous six years of existence, TMQ has offered the generic forecast, "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 this generic prediction, I was right -- the Ravens in 2000 and Patriots in 2001, Super Bowl victors, did not appear on "Monday Night Football." (The Rams won in 1999 after not appearing on Monday night, but there was no TMQ that season.) In 2003, my prediction came oh so close -- Carolina, not a Monday night baby, lost the Super Bowl on the final snap. Two years ago, my prediction came oh so close -- Pittsburgh and Atlanta, half of the conference championship round, were not Monday night babies. Last year was a washout, with all championship-round teams being Monday night entrants. Anyway, my generic formula is 2-for-6 in forecasting Lombardi Trophy winners. Remember, invariably I am picking losing teams the league braintrust believes have absolutely zero chance.

This year the hill has never been harder to climb. With more "Monday Night Football" diversity, the list of non-Monday teams has dwindled to Buffalo, Cleveland, Detroit, Houston, Kansas City, San Francisco and Tennessee. That's a sorry, no-account bunch. Perhaps I should abandon my generic Super Bowl prediction. Yet, the football gods sayeth thus to mortals: Dance with the one what brung ya. A lackluster guy takes you to the dance, but he picks you up in a washed car and brings you a nosegay. At the dance there's some flashy guy who makes a move on you. But if he's so great, why doesn't he already have a date? Dance with the one what brung ya! This is football wisdom at

its most primal. Thus I will not stray from my generic prediction: Buffalo, Cleveland, Detroit, Houston, Kansas City, San Francisco or Tennessee will win the Super Bowl. If the league braintrust thinks they are all awful, one of them must be good. I'll stand with my generic Super Bowl forecast, even though the teams in question are, at this writing, 2-12.

In other football news, fortune favors the bold! Trailing Buffalo 13-0 in their home opener, the Dolphins faced a fourth-and-1 on their own 40 at the end of the third quarter. As the punt unit trotted onto the field, TMQ thought, "This has got to be a fake. No self-respecting high school team would punt in this situation." I was sure the up-back would creep toward the line as if counting defenders, then put his hands under center, take the snap and plunge straight ahead. Skies darkened and lightning flashed above my house as the football gods showed their displeasure when the Miami punter swung his leg. As punishment for this ultra-fraidy-cat call, the football gods caused the punt to be blocked; Miami went on to lose 16-6. Down by two touchdowns at home, one yard to go on your own 40 -- you can't seriously be punting! Which leads to the question of whether football teams should *ever* punt -- a question that will be the subject of an upcoming column.

In more news, it must be election time, since Washington, D.C., looks awful. Flash back to last season. The Redskins won six straight to finish the regular season, making the playoffs and averaging 27 points a game during that run; their season ended with a loss in the divisionals at Seattle, and there's no shame in losing on the road to the eventual Super Bowl entrant. Since things were good at the end of 2005, stay the course, right? But every offseason, Chainsaw Dan Snyder must make dramatic changes, if only to get his name in the papers. So Chainsaw Dan declared dramatic changes -- new offensive coordinator, new offensive system, new receiver corps, departure for Robert Royal, the league's best blocking tight end (the Redskins' runners *really* miss Royal), other changes. Two games into 2006, Washington has two Ls and one offensive touchdown. As Tuesday Morning Quarterback noted in its NFC preview, by the time this season is over, Redskins fans might wish Snyder had simply done nothing in the offseason, leaving well enough alone.

And in other news, why isn't Kenneth Starr investigating Reggie Bush? *Who paid for that room-service cheeseburger?* Come on, don't tell me you've already forgotten who Kenneth Starr is.

**Stat of the Week No. 1:** In their home openers, the Broncos, Bucs, Dolphins, Lions, Packers and Raiders scored a combined 21 points.

**Stat of the Week No. 2:** Atlanta, Baltimore, Chicago and San Diego have won their initial games by a combined 216-29.

**Stat of the Week No. 3:** The Raiders and Bucs have been outscored 96-9.

**Stat of the Week No. 4:** Through the first six quarters of the new season, Chicago outscored its opponents 50-0.

**Stat of the Week No. 5:** Oakland and Tampa have yet to record a touchdown, while Denver and Detroit have scored just one touchdown.

**Stat of the Week No. 6:** Baltimore and Atlanta have not given up a touchdown.

**Stat: of the Week No. 7:** Warrick Dunn of Atlanta has more rushing yards than 26 entire NFL teams.

**Stat of the Week No. 8:** Michael Vick of Atlanta has more rushing yards than 11 entire NFL teams.

**Stat of the Week No. 9:** At 1:17 p.m. Eastern on Sept. 17, Green Bay scored for the first time in the 2006 season. At 2:21 p.m. Eastern on Sept. 17, Oakland scored for the first time in the season. At 2:31 p.m. Eastern on Sept. 17, Tampa scored for the first time in the season.

**Stat of the Week No. 10:** Stretching back to last season, 2005 playoff teams Carolina, Tampa and Washington are on a combined 0-9 streak.

**Stat of the Week No. 11:** Stretching back to 2004, the Colts are on a 23-0 streak in regular season games that matter to the standings or playoff seeding. (Reader stat submitted by Kevin Daly of Indianapolis.)

**Stat of the Week No. 12:** In prime time television games against Pittsburgh, Jacksonville is 5-1.

**Cheerleader of the Week:** James Denas of Cincinnati nominates [Liz of the Ben-Gals](#), who holds a degree in computer engineering and works in the IT department of an Ohio utility company. Liz's mother and sister were also Cincinnati Bengals cheerleaders, Denas reports. According to her team bio, Liz's advice to aspiring cheerleaders is to smile. Existential angst is not a career plus in the cheering profession!

**Not Another Punt! I Can't Look!** The punt-happy Jaguars, who took themselves out of last season's key showdown against Indianapolis by punting in Colts territory, faced a fourth-and-2 on the Pittsburgh 39, game scoreless, and launched a mincing fraidy-cat punt (after trying to draw the Steelers offside, a tactic that has not worked in the NFL since 1963). Next possession, game still scoreless, Jacksonville faced a fourth-and-1 at midfield and launched a mincing fraidy-cat punt. Two possessions later, Jax faced a fourth-and-4 on the Pittsburgh 48 and boomed a punt. Finally in the fourth quarter, Jacksonville led 3-0 and faced a fourth-and-6 on the Pittsburgh 37 -- you just cannot be punting from the opposition's 37! Boom goes the punt into the end zone for a ridiculous net of only 17 yards in field position.

*Four preposterous punts in the same game* -- yet the Jaguars prevailed. Holy mackerel, did Jacksonville play defense! The Jags held Pittsburgh to an average of just 3.2 yards per play, well below the NFL average of about 5 yards. You'll watch a lot of football (note: a good idea) before you see harder hitting on defense or better pursuit. Sports radio yaks a lot about "statement" games, which rarely actually happen. Last season, Jacksonville had two chances to play a statement game, against Indianapolis in December and against New England in the playoffs, and honked both. But this time Jacksonville seemed totally determined to make its statement, and did. Plus, because Pittsburgh was one play away from the lead until the final moments, this was a rare example of a low-scoring game that was exciting from start to finish. And it ended before midnight Eastern! What more could a football addict ask?

**Sweet Team of the Week:** Atlanta out-rushed City of Tampa by 266 yards, one week after out-rushing Carolina by 187 yards. Ye gods. Remember, Carolina and Tampa have good defenses. It sure seems to be working to let Vick be himself -- forget about trying to make Vick a pocket passer, let him drive defenses to distraction by running and complete the occasional pass as an afterthought. On Sunday, Atlanta used a modified version of the college option play: Vick was reading the defensive end to decide whether to hand off up the gut or keep it and run wide. TMQ can't remember how long it's been since an NFL team featured a college option look. If this level of rushing superiority continues -- offensive line play has been tops for the Falcons too -- Atlanta might be the team that no one wants to play in 2006. Worrisome note No. 1: Atlanta's stand-in place-kicker Michael Koenen is 2-for-8 on field-goal attempts. Worrisome note No. 2: On Sunday, both Vick and cornerback DeAngelo Hall held the ball up and waved it around as they ran in the clear. No. Oh, no.

**Sweet Play of the Week:** Recovering the fumble on Carolina's botched trick play (see below), Minnesota faced a fourth-and-5 on the Panthers' 16 with eight minutes remaining, trailing 13-6. Since a trick play just failed, there isn't going to be another trick play, right? That's what the Cats

were thinking. Fake field goal, and the kicker, Ryan Longwell, throws the touchdown to backup fullback Richard Owens, who lined up as a tight end. Tuesday Morning Quarterback likes fake field-goal attempts and wishes the pros would use them more often. Meanwhile, Carolina violated the Iron Law of Kick Defense, which is to expect a fake whenever it's fourth-and-5 or less -- since the offense needs only a few yards to retain possession. To make matters worse, Carolina had blocked the previous Minnesota field-goal attempt. When you just rejected an opponent's kick, you should be doubly on guard against a fake kick in a short-yardage situation.

**Sweet Block of the Week:** Laveranues Coles of the Jets could not have made his sweet 46-yard catch-and-run touchdown against New England without a perfect downfield block by Chris Baker. Often in broken-field-running situations, blockers end up whiffing because they stand around trying to figure out where the runner is going, or charge too far downfield as if they themselves had the ball. In the open field, every blocker should simply eliminate the man closest to him, and let the runner make the decisions about where the play will go. Baker smartly eliminated the closest man, who was behind him -- which turned out to be the key to the touchdown, because Coles cut back.

**Sweet 'N Sour Play of the Week:** Thin air makes it hard to sprint, and also makes you drowsy; everyone in the stands and on the field was having trouble remaining alert with the score Chiefs 6, Broncos 3 late in the fourth quarter at 5,280 feet in Denver. With six minutes left, Denver had a first-and-goal on the Kansas City 1. Loss of yardage, incompleteness, incompleteness, field goal forces overtime. Just a wink of the eye ago, Denver was beating New England in the playoffs and boasting about the Super Bowl; since then the Broncos have lost two of three and scored just two touchdowns in nine quarters of home-field play. On third-and-goal on the 4, the Denver coaches called a jump-ball fade pattern to Stephen Alexander, a tight end; Kansas City had Alexander double-covered. That was sweet for Kansas City. But a fade to a tight end? That was sour for Denver.

**Sweet Defensive Play of the Week:** Trailing Dallas 17-10 late in the third quarter, Washington faced a third-and-9 on the Cowboys' 21. Dallas blitzed six, and Washington kept seven back to block; yet with seven blocking six, the Cowboys' rushers almost immediately put pressure on Mark Brunell. Three receivers out in the pattern against five in coverage meant the safeties were free to double, and Dallas played the down perfectly, doubling both receivers Brunell looked toward. The Nanticokes' quarterback heave-hoed deep to H-back Chris Cooley; interception, Dallas scores on the ensuing possession and the game turns from tense to a walkover. One can wonder why, trailing by seven points, with plenty of time and the ball on the opponent's 21, Brunell launched a daffy heave-ho into double coverage rather than throw the ball away and allow a field-goal attempt on the next down. As this column often points out, sometimes the smartest play a quarterback can make is to throw the ball out of bounds. But then everything is out of whack for the Redskins' offense.

**Sour Play of the Week No. 1:** With Baltimore leading 16-3, Oakland faced a third-and-10 on its own 4. Novice quarterback Andrew Walter sprinted backward into the end zone, safety, and any remaining drama expired. A week ago in a similar situation, novice quarterback J.P. Losman sprinted backward into the end zone, safety. Novice quarterbacks: Don't sprint backward into the end zone! At the beginning of the Oakland play, Raiders' center Jake Grove was knocked down. Check the tape. For the entire play, as Walter drove desperately to avoid being sacked for a safety, Grove just sat on his keister watching, doing nothing, not making the slightest attempt to get up and help his quarterback. Wasn't Art Shell going to restore pride to Raiders football? If Shell tolerates this kind of lack of effort, Oakland will get even worse.

**In NBC's Tuesday Morning Quarterback Series, I Am Played by Ashton Kutcher While the Broncos' Cheerleaders Play My Interns:** NBC's upcoming series about high school football,

"Friday Night Lights," [will air on Tuesday nights](#). Doesn't this mean that when NBC makes a series based on Tuesday Morning Quarterback, the show will run on Friday?

**Sour Play of the Week No. 2:** Minnesota trailed 13-6 and lined up to punt to the Panthers with 10 minutes remaining. The Carolina coaches called the throwback play, in which the return man fields the ball and heaves a cross-field lateral to the opposite side. Chris Gamble of Carolina fielded the punt and got spun around; as he came out of the spin he heave-hoed wildly to the opposite side of the field -- fumble, Minnesota recovers and scores on the next possession to tie the game. Who's to blame here? On all trick plays that involve anyone other than the quarterback throwing the ball, the coaching standard is that the player is told: Throw it only if everything is perfect, the receiver is totally alone and you are not under pressure. Any situation other than perfect, just run with the ball and we don't care if you take a loss. Gamble seemed so intent on heaving the ball into the air that I got the impression he had not received that key bit of trick-play coaching, that you only throw if everything about the play is totally perfect.

**Sour Game Situation:** Chad Johnson of the Bengals got popped hard and staggered off the field woozy with two minutes remaining against Cleveland. Many in the sports-yak world have wondered what he was doing on the field with Cincinnati leading 34-10 and two minutes to play. But wait, Carson Palmer was also on the field, and Rudi Johnson, and the Cincinnati starting offensive line. What were any of these guys doing on the field with two minutes left in a rout? For that matter, *why was Cincinnati passing?* Two minutes remaining, a 34-10 lead and the first team is still on the field, heaving passes, trying to run up the score. The football gods will exact vengeance for this.

**Beefcake of the Week:** Jerry Porter of the Raiders might be refusing to play, and soon might be joined by 52 other gentlemen. But though he's refusing to put on pads, he is happy to remove his shirt. Here, for female and nontraditional male fans, is a recent beefcake photo of Porter.

**Buck-Buck-Brawckkkkkkk No. 1:** Trailing Indianapolis 17-0, Houston faced a fourth-and-2 on the Colts' 25. In came the field goal unit. TMQ's law is Kick Early, Go For It Late. Standard exception: Unless way behind. Plus the Texans were the worst team in the league last season -- what has Houston got to lose??? As the field goal boomed, TMQ wrote the words "game over" in his notebook.

**Buck-Buck-Brawckkkkkkk No. 2** Trailing Atlanta 14-0 and not having scored a touchdown in 2006, City of Tampa faced a second-and-goal on the Falcons' 1 with one second remaining in the first half. In came the field goal unit. Yes, I preach Kick Early, Go For It Late. Exception: Unless you haven't scored a touchdown yet this season! In 2005, Jon "Once I Was A Teenaged Coach" Gruden ignited a Bucs' rally for a playoff run by going for it in a similar high-pressure situation against Washington. This time he timidly sent on the kicking team, and the Bucs never threatened again.

**Stop Me Before I Blitz Again!** Philadelphia rolled up eight sacks against the Giants by frequent blitzing, and several times blatant holds by G-Men offensive linemen weren't called; had officials not decided on Sunday to waive the offensive holding rule regarding the Giants, Philadelphia would have led by a greater margin than 24-7 at the start of the fourth quarter. Nonetheless, by the fourth quarter Jersey/A had adjusted and the Philadelphia blitz began to backfire. In overtime, Philadelphia had Jersey/A facing third-and-11 on the Eagles' 31; an incompletion would have meant a 48-yard field-goal attempt for Jay Feely, who is not a distance kicker. Surely Eagles' coaches have read the analysis in Pro Football Prospectus 2006, which shows in great detail that while six-man blitzing is effective, seven-man and eight-man blitzes backfire. There's the snap, and as seven Eagles crossed

the line I said aloud to Spenser, my youngest, "That's it, Giants win." Thirty-one yard touchdown to Plaxico Burress.

**Get That Segway Off My Sidewalk!** Last week, Segway recalled 23,000 of its annoying self-propelled scooters [after revealing](#) the machines' software "can unexpectedly reverse the direction of the wheels which can cause a rider to fall." The Consumer Product Safety Commission advised Segway owners to stop using the machines. So the Segway spontaneously shifts into reverse -- and TMQ would like to see the whole product category shift into reverse. The Segway is the SUV of the sidewalk. The manufacturer claims Segways have environmental benefits, and gullible journalists echo this assertion. But the heavy, motorized Segway is usually used in lieu of bicycles. How, exactly, does it benefit the planet to replace pedaling atop a few pounds of metal with riding a device containing a large amount of resources and powered by centrally generated electricity? Segway even sells a [trail model](#) -- now that's really green, encourage people to stop hiking and ride through in the wilderness instead. Segways do have some reasonable roles: for getting around factories and resorts, for police patrols. But the promotion of the Segway as a tool of urban commuting is ridiculous, as it places on crowded sidewalks a 105-pound metallic battering ram going 12 miles an hour. Being hit by 105 pounds of metal moving 12 mph is equivalent to being popped by an NFL linebacker. Some localities have outlawed Segways from sidewalks. All should, as these machines are dangerous to pedestrians and, in my observation, within cities are operated mainly by rich twits (a Segway costs about \$5,000) who expect everyone else to jump out of their way.

On the heels of the recall comes word that Segway is offering a [new model](#) with *no steering wheel*. That's right, no steering wheel; the thing is supposed to "intuit" where its rider wants to go. "The LeanSteer frame and handlebar tilt left and right in response to your body's natural inclination to lean in the direction you want to travel," Segway claims. Your body's "natural inclination to lean in the direction you want to travel"? I walk a lot, and my body does not lean in the direction I want to go. Segway's manufacturer can't even keep the product from going into reverse by mistake, and now the company wants to put models without steering wheels on crowded urban sidewalks? No thanks.

**Note That It Was Not a Money-Back Guarantee** Roy Williams of the Lions would be the perfect spokesman for the Segway! Let's hope he never guarantees that a new Ford car will sell.

**Kenneth Starr, Scotland Yard, CIA, Mi6, United Nations, Komitet Gosudarstvenno-Bezopasnosti, Impossible Mission Force and International Court of Justice at the Hague Launch Investigations into Who Paid for Reggie Bush's Mother's Manicure:** Last week Yahoo! Sports ran a report asserting Reggie Bush and his family "appear" to have taken about \$100,000 worth of housing, gifts and travel expenses while Bush was playing at USC. If true this would violate NCAA rules, and might lead to the revocation of Bush's Heisman Trophy. Two points suggest themselves:

- Of course NCAA players should follow the rules -- but the rules are two-faced. Football-factory programs seek money at every turn; there are few limits on how boosters can give cash and favors to schools and coaches. If schools were subjected to anything like the strictures on players, many NCAA coaches and athletic directors would be banned and many seasons of top 25 universities would retroactively be forfeited. Suppose the worst thing Reggie Bush does in his life is arrange a less-than-kosher vacation for his mother. In that case, I like Reggie Bush.
- When prospective agents dangle favors to sign football players, it is the shoe contracts and other endorsements, not the NFL deals, being lusted after. NFLPA rules generally limit agents to a 3 percent commission, one of the lowest such fractions in the agency profession: The standard literary

agent's commission for authors is 15 percent, for instance. That means the agent of an NFL player receiving a \$10 million bonus takes a \$300,000 commission, and only a few players per year get a check in the \$10 million range. The more common case, a three-year veteran earning the league third-year minimum of \$500,000, would produce a \$15,000 commission to the agent. For shoe contracts and product endorsements, by contrast, there are no rules, just whatever the player, corporation and agent mutually agree upon. Because there are no limits on what adidas or Pepsi pay Bush's representatives, it was Bush's marketing deals that made agents salivate. There was no frantic scramble among agents to represent D'Brickashaw Ferguson, though Ferguson went in roughly the same place in the draft and his NFL bonuses are in the same class as Bush's. But Ferguson is an offensive tackle unlikely ever to be a national marketing figure, leaving his financial value to agents far lower.

**The Story of the Tampa-Atlanta Game:** Trailing 14-3, the Buccaneers had first-and-10 on their 31 with 9:34 remaining in the game. Incompletion, incompletion, incompletion, punt. So far Chris Simms has no touchdown passes and six interceptions. Who is the Bucs' backup quarterback? Why, Bruce Gradkowski, of course.

**Future Historians Blame 21st Century Bolt for Decision to Evacuate Earth:** Astronauts last week accidentally let go of two bolts during spacewalks to unfurl a new [solar array](#) on the International Space Station. Each weighing about two ounces, the bolts floated away. Don't you just sense that centuries from now, a starcruiser jumping to quadraspace will hit one of the bolts and vaporize the upper atmosphere of Earth? At extreme speeds, contact with even tiny amounts of matter would cause calamitous releases of energy -- one of the challenges that will face future starship designers.

**Trust Us, We're Experts:** Sports Illustrated predicted Carolina and Miami will meet in the Super Bowl. So far those teams are a combined 0-4.

**We're All Professionals Here:** Sack, lost fumble, run for no gain, sack: the first four Houston offensive snaps against Indianapolis.

**We're All Professionals Here No. 2:** Miami staged a 14-play, 80-yard drive that resulted in no points. Through the preseason and two regular-season games, Daunte Culpepper has one touchdown pass in 112 attempts.

**A Tale of Three Quarterbacks:** Vince Young might not be ready, but can anyone tell me what Kerry Collins, in off the street, is doing starting for the Flaming Thumbtacks while the pretty decent Billy Volek is exiled to the inactive list? Collins threw six completions and two interceptions. The first Tennessee possession, with Collins at the helm: incompletion, incompletion, incompletion, punt. Not that long ago the Titans were one of the league's most feared teams, building up to four playoff trips in five seasons and a Super Bowl appearance; then Tennessee suffered a salary cap crash caused by trying to keep the Super Bowl cast together as long as possible. Now it's no longer funny. Since the start of the 2004 season, Tennessee is 9-25. The Titans are regularly blown out, and seem destined for an awful season even if Young plays and improves.

**A Tale of Two Other Quarterbacks:** As for Drew Brees and Philip Rivers, both looked great on Sunday -- they combined to throw 51-for-76 for 586 yards, three touchdowns and one interception.

**This Week's "Stargate" Complaint:** Many readers, including Nisim Estrada of Avondale, Ariz., wrote to note that Sci-Fi Channel just announced it plans to cancel "Stargate SG-1," the longest-running science-fiction series ever in American television, while keeping the plodding spinoff "Stargate Atlantis" in production at least one more season. The news poses a challenge to "SG-1" writers, since scripts for the current season already should be complete and are said to end with a

cliffhanger that sets up a final season that now will not happen. (This is the reverse of the challenge the writers faced two years ago, when they set up a series-finale episode only to be renewed at the last moment.) Yes, many recent "Stargate SG-1" episodes have been weak, and it's clear producers are desperate for ideas. Yet TMQ does not understand why "SG-1" should be canceled, considering it's not exactly as if Sci-Fi Channel is sagging under the weight of programming anyone wants to watch. For 10 years, "Stargate SG-1" has been mainly entertaining, and its recent 200th episode, devoted to the show making fun of itself (characters transformed into puppets, among other things) was really clever.

Sense of humor has been the best quality of "SG-1"; if you listen carefully almost every episode contains a self-mocking reference. In this, "Stargate SG-1" follows the lead of the original Kirk-and-Spock "Star Trek," which had more jokes than its excessively serious successors. The decline of humor in the "Star Trek" serials was, I've always thought, a reason for their ratings deterioration. This makes it especially irritating that "SG-1" might end while the plodding "Atlantis" continues. Since a promising first season, "Stargate Atlantis" has offered clunker episode after clunker episode -- the past two have been egregious. The initially intriguing "Stargate Atlantis" premise of 100 people volunteering for a one-way trip to another galaxy had tension and interest. Now that, inexplicably, the portal between Earth and the distant galaxy can be used at any time, the interest is gone, while "Atlantis" has become a repetitive outer-space soap opera. ("Look, the Wraith are attacking again!") Why save the monotonous "Atlantis" at the expense of wise-cracking "SG-1"?

If these shows are winding down, I'd better get in my Stargate complaints in while I still can. Here is generic Stargate dialogue that could be inserted into any episode, at any point:

ANY CHARACTER: We've got to tell the Asgard what the Gou'ald said to the Tokra about the Ori.

ANY OTHER CHARACTER: But the Jaffa don't want the Tau'ri to know what the Athosians found out about the Genii.

COLONEL CARTER: The gate-room plasma generator has gone into neutron overload! It's causing a baryonic antidecompensation feedback loop that will release 100,000 terrajoules of dark energy and fold the entire Earth into a single wave packet! (She pushes a bunch of buttons really fast.) OK, everything's fine now.

Here's another Stargate complaint I need to get on the record while there's time. In the world of "SG-1" and "Atlantis," it is the present day, yet the world already has built four capital starships -- the Prometheus, Daedalus, Korolev and Odyssey -- using designs given to the Air Force by friendly aliens. These enormous faster-than-light vessels are capable of reaching other galaxies, whereas Captain Kirk's Enterprise could travel only within our own Milky Way. Gigantic starcruisers flown by the U.S. Air Force did not show up in the Stargate serials until recent seasons. Obviously the scriptwriters need material, but TMQ liked the original Stargate premise better. The original premise was that archeologists in Egypt discover an entry point for an ancient network of gates that allow instantaneous travel across the cosmos; a handful of Earth's best step through the gate, having no idea what's on the other side and able to take along only that which they can carry. That premise forced plots to focus on contact with strange distant societies and to emphasize the small, halting nature of the human presence. Now that Earth has a fleet of gigantic starships, both Stargate shows depict humanity as a central player in grand events spanning several galaxies. The shows now present United States military units swanning about the universe like cosmic Rambos, easily defeating super-advanced aliens who have possessed light-speed technology for thousands of years. And now armed with starships, both shows have switched from plot-driven scripts to computer-animated space battles. ("Shields at 40 percent!")

Be these things as they may, Tuesday Morning Quarterback wonders -- even if friendly aliens gave us starcruiser plans, could we manufacture the ships? Merely having the plans would not be the same as having the construction base. If someone from the future had materialized in the 18th century workshop of the Scottish prodigy James Watt and handed him a set of plans for a Boeing 747, the inventor of the steam engine hardly would have been able to manufacture a jetliner. Then there's cost: imagine the cost overruns if Halliburton got the contract for starship assembly. In the "Stargate" shows, Earth's starcruisers are depicted as roughly the size of a *Nimitz*-class supercarrier. Currently the United States is able to build *Nimitz*-class aircraft carriers at the rate of about one every five years, at about \$8 billion per broken champagne bottle. And aircraft carriers do not have hyperdrive or transporter beams! (Though, they do have movie theaters.)

If it takes five years for the actual United States to build one somewhat advanced aircraft carrier, how could the United States of the "Stargate" reality have built four enormous super-advanced starcruisers in just a couple seasons? To top it off, in "Stargate" the fact that Earth has acquired starships is ultra-secret. So where did the money come from? Hundreds of billions of dollars would be involved, and not even Congress could lose track of that much money. Meanwhile thousands of workers and huge industrial facilities would be entailed. Take a look-see at [these photos of construction](#) of the *Ronald Reagan*, the most recently christened U.S. aircraft carrier. There could be four construction projects of this magnitude going on simultaneously and *no one would notice*?

**Berman-Jackson Lives!** One consequence of the new set of NFL master contracts that moved "Monday Night Football" to ESPN and the Sunday night game to NBC was the end of the old ESPN "Primetime" highlights show. For 19 years this show ran at 7:30 Eastern on Sunday night, with Chris Berman and Tom Jackson delivering rapid-fire highlights and analyses of games. But the contracts now give an exclusive to NBC on Sunday during prime time. When the end of "Primetime" came last January, a smart guy writing for NFL.com [eulogized the program](#) by calling it "hands-down the best show of its kind in the business," also saying the Berman-Jackson format had "a huge positive impact on the expanding popularity of professional football," allowing any fan to become an instant expert on the day's action. But all good things must end, and "Primetime" ended.

So after Week 1, I click on the kitchen television at 6:15 Monday morning and there are Berman and Jackson showing NFL highlights and talking too fast to be understood, just like always. Huh? What? It turns out the spirit of "Primetime" lives on in a new production called "The Blitz." This show comes on during "SportsCenter" on Sunday nights, starting at roughly 11 Eastern -- by contract, the NBC game must end first -- and is repeated overnight and through Monday morning. The new show isn't exactly "Primetime" reborn: because it's part of "SportsCenter," topics other than football are discussed. But if, like me, you have a 19-year addiction to the Berman-Jackson football worldview, they haven't vanished! Tune in "SportCenter" around 11 Eastern -- just in time for that evening glass of port in California -- or set your recorder while you slumber. The start time is quirky. This Sunday baseball ran late, meaning Berman and Jackson did not begin in earnest until a little after midnight Eastern. Also meaning they are such football nuts they are willing to be in the studio working after midnight! It's good, indeed, that this pair is back doing what they do better than anyone else.

**Best Purist Drives:** Buffalo ran on eight consecutive downs during one drive, six consecutive downs during another drive; both possessions resulted in field goals.

**Houston Texans Sack-O-Meter:** David Carr has now been sacked 217 times in 61 career starts.

**Cowboys to Install Electronic Stability Control in Terrell Owens:** While Segways continue to ricochet down sidewalks out of control, there was great news last week regarding auto safety. The Department of Transportation announced a proposal that would make electronic stability control, which significantly reduces the odds of spin-out and roll-over, will be [required on all cars](#), SUVs and pickup trucks beginning with the 2009 model year. Considering the high-profile public razzle over the federal airbag requirement, the news about electronic stability control received remarkably little notice -- though airbags save 1,000 to 2,000 lives per year and ESC is expected to save as many as 10,000 lives annually. Why wasn't the most significant auto safety advance in 20 years front-page news? Possibly because it is a federal safety regulation, thus conflicting with the preferred media storyline of a sinister George W. Bush rolling back federal health and safety regulations.

Though the Bush White House deserves applause for the new rule, which will add a couple hundred dollars to the price of a new vehicle, it continues to drive me crazy that the DOT will not mandate two safety measures that are essentially free -- daytime running lights and heated side mirrors. Canada mandates both, at a cost of perhaps \$5 per new vehicle. Studies show that daytime running lights reduce accident frequency and severity, while heated side mirrors improve the driver's ability to see other cars. Heated side mirrors have traditionally been viewed as a luxury option. They are a safety device, and everything that rolls down the road should have them.

**Wacky Food of the Week:** Reader Todd Harmon of St. Louis reports the Gateway Grizzlies minor league baseball team sold a [bacon cheeseburger served between slices of a Krispy Kreme donut](#). Don't the Grizzlies want their customers to live long enough to attend next season's games? "Our doughnuts have been used in such things as wedding cakes, bread pudding, fondue, and now as a hamburger bun," a Krispy Kreme spokeswoman said.

**Sominex Presents the NFL Game of the Week:** Denver 9, Kansas City 6, in overtime.

**Last Year It Was Green Bay Over New Orleans by 52-3, This Year ... :** As the New Orleans Saints defeated the Green Bay Packers at Lambeau Field -- note to copy desk, please check statement for factual accuracy -- one bright spot for Green Bay was a touchdown catch by Greg Jennings, a rookie wide receiver. Jennings blew past New Orleans corner Mike McKenzie, who was making the high school mistake of "looking into the backfield," trying to guess the play rather than cover his man. After the play Spenser, my 11-year-old, asked, "When is it OK for the cornerback to look into the backfield?" Easy answer: Never! Cornerbacks look into the backfield out of sloth; they want to see that it's a run and they don't have to do anything on this down. Simple rule for cornerbacks not wishing to be beaten for touchdowns: *Never* look into the backfield.

**Bills Try Innovative New Tactic -- Put Everyone on IR:** Last week Buffalo general manager Marv Levy placed veteran leader Troy Vincent, who has a minor injury, into an injured reserve category which specifies that he cannot return to the Bills in 2006, but can become a free agent once healed. The result is that Buffalo will pay Vincent his \$2.6 million salary for the season -- as a vested veteran, his 2006 contract terms became guaranteed when he was on the opening-day roster -- yet may join another team this fall. Vincent might even end up playing against the Bills, with Buffalo paying him to do so! It might be that the Bills think Vincent's 15-year career is finished, and have essentially given him a \$2.6 million severance in respect for his accomplishments. (Vincent is president of the NFLPA and among the league's most-admired people.) The alternative explanation is that Levy is lining up excuses -- "We were clobbered by injuries, no wonder we went 4-12." Setting expectations low is a time-honored exercise in the NFL. Early on, every coach complains about what a killer schedule his team faces, though it cannot be that everyone's schedule is harder than everyone else's. Complaining is part of the expectations game: if the team does poorly then the

killer schedule can be blamed, whereas if the team does well, the coach must be a genius for overcoming the killer schedule! If by December the Bills are in the doghouse, listen to see if Levy says, "Well, if we hadn't lost Troy after the first game ..."

**Best Use of TMQ:** Last week Tuesday Morning Quarterback chided Jeremy Shockey for failing to lunge out of bounds on the Giants' last-gasp drive against Indianapolis. Sunday, Giants trailing by three with 15 seconds remaining in regulation, Shockey caught a sideline pass in Philadelphia territory and hurled himself out of bounds, stopping the clock and setting up Jersey/A's tying field goal. Jeremy, it pays to read TMQ!

**This Fulfills My Obligation to Say Something About the San Francisco-St. Louis Game:** First-overall draft pick Alex Smith has now thrown twice as many touchdown passes in 2006 (two) as he did in 2005 (one).

**Negative Ads Backfire!:** TMQ lives in Montgomery County, Maryland, and last week in the county primary, a [Howard University professor named Isaiah Leggett](#) won the Democratic nomination for county executive. In keeping with the rule that most local elections are decided by the primary, this makes it close to certain Leggett will be the county's next executive. As someone who had a green LEGGETT sign on his lawn for weeks, I think two things about this vote are worth noting. (Not that you could stop me.) First, Montgomery County is mainly white, yet an African-American is poised to run its government -- and race was a total non-issue in the campaign. Let's hope this represents a harbinger of how American politics eventually will be. Second, negative political ads backfired! Leggett's opponent was the favorite, and his fundraising went much better than Leggett's: The opponent raised \$2.2 million, a huge amount for a county primary. Flush with cash, he ran television attack advertising against Leggett. The nastiness of the ads seemed to swing the race to Leggett, who is well-known to be a lovely person; in fact, the strongest objection to his candidacy was that he's too mannerly and academic for high office. Polls consistently show that voters are disgusted by attack ads, yet they vote for candidates who run them. Maybe if a new standard were to develop -- of understanding that the kind of politician who runs attack ads is the kind of politician who runs attack ads -- the civility level of campaigns would rise.

**Obscure College Score of the Week:** Bucknell 20, Cornell 5. The Big Red faithful lament -- if only we'd gotten eight more safeties! Located in Lewisburg, Pa., Bucknell is too renown to qualify as an obscure college. But the school has a little-known quality with regards to modern sports: It both plays Division I *and* graduates its athletes. Bucknell sent its men's basketball team to the NCAA tournament last March, where the Bison were the sole tourney college that had graduated all scholarship athletes in the most recent NCAA ranking. Bucknell won the clever [athletics-and-academics bracket](#) recently assembled by Inside Higher Education. Bucknell's Sean Conover, a rookie defensive end on the Tennessee Titans' practice squad, was busy last spring because before reporting to the Titans he put on a funny-looking gown and graduated. Bucknell often leads Division I schools in athletes' graduation rates, and is fourth all time in total Academic All-American honors dispensed by ESPN The Magazine. Attention other universities -- it is not impossible to have major sports programs that graduate their athletes, you just have to *care about education*. Cornell note: though this school (the most beautiful campus in academia and TMQ's favorite Ivy) costs \$45,767 a year, its athletics department's Web site nonetheless has pop-up ads.

**Bonus Obscure College Score:** Ursinus 6, LaSalle 2. The Explorers' faithful lament -- if only we'd gotten three more safeties! Located in Philadelphia, LaSalle University has a faculty member who is an [expert on Robin Hood](#).

**Bonus Combined Obscure Scores:** Saint Francis of Indiana and Saint John's of Minnesota beat Pikeville and Augsburg by a combined 123-0. Running up the score is not saintly behavior!

**Running Up the Score Watch:** TCU held the boastful Texas Tech to a field goal in a 12-3 victory. Two years ago, Texas Tech relentlessly ran up the score on the Horned Frogs, notching 70 points; TCU had been smarting for vengeance, and by the hammer of Grabthar, they were avenged! Meanwhile Mount Union College -- year-in, year-out home of the worst sportsmanship in Division III -- relentlessly ran up the score on Otterbein, winning 71-14.

**I'd Be Willing to Run Pfizer for Only \$129,000 Per Day:** Much news and sports commentary focuses on the ever-larger paychecks of professional athletes. But even Peyton Manning is a day laborer compared to the modern Fortune 500 CEO. In May, Exxon Mobil shareholders passed the first resolution in company history to be enacted over opposition of the board of directors; at issue was shareholder fury regarding the \$168 million retiring CEO Lee Raymond awarded himself in his final year. "There's some unhappiness about the way Raymond's compensation was handled," new Exxon Mobil CEO Rex Tillerson dryly told a news conference. During the summer Hank McKinnell was ousted as CEO of Pfizer. Over his last five years at the helm, he got \$162 million, even as Pfizer earnings faltered. Carol Hymowitz of the Wall Street Journal reported that the head of Pfizer's "compensation committee" defended McKinnell's windfall on grounds of market forces in executive pay -- which in this context appears to mean, "CEOs at other companies are picking shareholders' pockets, too." There just wasn't anybody who would have taken the Pfizer job for less than \$162 million? McKinnell's pay for his tenure atop Pfizer equates to \$130,000 per work day.

Not all Fortune 500 CEOs are glorified pickpockets. For instance, James Skinner, the CEO of McDonald's, paid himself \$3.4 million in 2005, as McDonald's income was rising. (All pay figures in this item fold together salary, bonus, stock options and stock grants.) A year's pay of \$3.4 million is a lot, but a CEO who makes good strategic decisions for a large firm easily could be worth that amount to shareholders. Contrast to Home Depot CEO Robert Nardelli, who is under pressure to resign owing to what the Louisville Courier-Journal earlier this month called "a firestorm over his pay and the Atlanta company's lagging stock price." During the past five years Nardelli has earned from the company \$245 million -- \$196,000 per work day -- though Home Depot's stock price has stagnated. Whether it's fair to judge a CEO by stock price is an open question. Economic theory says stock prices represent the market's guess about a corporation's future value: that is, what future buyers will be willing to pay for the shares. CEOs have no control over what investors guess regarding their company's future, while pressuring them to prop up stock using short-term gimmicks leads to accounting scandals. Corporate executives are more fairly judged by sales and profits than by stock prices, and in the case of Home Depot, those numbers are strong; that the stock price is stagnate reflects the market's guess about the company's future, namely that it is unlikely to expand much more. But sympathizing with the pressure Nardelli is under is no justification for him being wildly overpaid, at shareholder and worker expense. And please don't tell me the prevailing prices for executives justified Nardelli's huge number, because this requires you to argue that there was not one single qualified manager willing to run Home Depot for less than \$245 million. "You're only offering \$244 million? Forget it!"

Bad enough is the matter of executives insisting what they receive be called "compensation." Workers get wages, white-collar employees get salaries and executives get "compensation," as if they were lofty philanthropists. Keep in mind Orwell's maxim that we cannot think clearly about things unless we call them what they are. By insisting their pay be referred to using a silly euphemism, executives make it harder to think clearly about their excesses. The media go along with this exercise in weasel-wording. Fannie Mae CEO Franklin Raines paid himself \$64 million

from 2001 to 2003, about \$85,000 per work day, during a period Fannie Mae was engaged in "fraudulent accounting," according to a recent report of the Office of Federal Housing Enterprise Oversight. Raines, the report said, manipulated Fannie Mae earnings so the numbers would trigger his maximum bonus milestones. Yet even when reporting on the federal document accusing Raines of fraud, news organization called the \$64 million Raines' "compensation," as if for a noble deed.

Next, consider that executive income usually is rubber-stamped by boards of directors whose members may be engaged in self-dealings with the firm, or who have a self-interest in rising CEO pay. As Julie Creswell noted in the New York Times, "Five of the six active Home Depot board members are current or former chief executives of public corporations ... CEOs benefit from one another's pay increases, because compensation packages are often based on surveys detailing what their peers are making."

Suppose I was placed on a committee that would vote on Peter King's salary. Suppose King would be paid with someone else's money; that there would be no penalty to me no matter how much I voted to lavish on him; and that my next ESPN contract offer would be based on a survey of what football columnists, including King, are earning. I'd vote King a huge increase -- maybe to \$196,000 a day! This is the situation boards of directors are in when they award wheelbarrows full of shareholders' cash to CEOs. The board members know the more they inflate CEO pay, the more they themselves will be able to pilfer from their own shareholders. In June, a New York state judge ruled a shareholders' lawsuit against Viacom could proceed. The suit alleges the board of directors breeched their fiduciary duty to shareholders by paying Viacom's top three executives \$160 million in 2004, or about \$213,000 per work day per executive. In 2004, Viacom lost a gasp-inducing \$18 billion. From the directors' standpoint, inflating the checks of the top managers had little downside. In most circumstances, company-paid liability policies effectively render directors immune from any legal consequences of their decisions, while overpaying executives adds to the arguments board members use to demand additional millions from their own corporations.

Recently the [Business Roundtable released a study](#) purporting to show that CEO pay rose 9.6 percent annually from 1995-2005, while stockholder returns rose 9.9 percent in the same period. So things aren't so bad, eh? The Business Roundtable said the study "sets the record straight." The Business Roundtable is, by its own description, "an association of chief executive officers of leading U.S. companies." As Gretchen Morgenson, dean of Wall Street journalists, laid it out in the New York Times, the study systematically understated the income of CEOs in two ways. First, the numbers exclude dividends received by CEOs on restricted stock holdings, and this is often a big chunk of executive income. Second, Morgenson wrote, "The study counts only the value of the options and restricted stock received by executives on the dates the awards were made."

That renders the study about as truthful as an Enron balance sheet. Suppose I award you an option for a share of Tuesday Morning Quarterback Enterprises, on a day the stock is selling for \$10. Naturally the value of my company skyrockets -- based on [hat and T-shirt sales](#), perhaps. The stock price hits \$50, you exercise the option, sell the share at \$50 and realize a \$40 gain. According to the Business Roundtable you made \$10. Include the value of gains on stock options and restricted grants, Morgenson found, and CEO pay increased far faster than shareholder returns in the last decade. Now guess who the chairman of the Business Roundtable was when the "sets the record straight" study was being prepared: Hank McKinnell of Pfizer. How does it serve the interests of CEOs for their trade association to be blatantly dishonest toward the public about CEO pay? Unless the Business Roundtable is saying that CEOs as a group wish to deceive the public.

**Reader Animadversion:** Got a complaint or a deeply held grievance? Write me at [TMQ\\_ESPN@yahoo.com](mailto:TMQ_ESPN@yahoo.com). Include your real name and the name of your hometown, and I might

quote you by name unless you instruct me otherwise. Note: Giving your hometown improves your odds of being quoted.

**Next Week:** The Stargate commandos use the wormhole to travel to a mirror universe where "Star Trek" has not been canceled and the other three promised "Star Wars" movies are actually being made.

**Monday, September 25, 2006**

**Updated: September 26, 8:03 PM ET**

It doesn't pay to punt

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By Gregg Easterbrook

Once again this weekend the NFL landscape was littered with Preposterous Punts. Trailing 24-3, San Francisco punted on fourth-and-1 on the Philadelphia 40. Even the great Bill Belichick ordered a punt from the Broncos' 35. As this column repeats ad infinitum (Latin for "by using AutoText"), NFL coaches punt in opposition territory, or on short yardage, in order to avoid blame -- if a team goes for it and fails the coach is blamed, whereas if a coach does the safe thing and kicks and then loses, the players are blamed. But skip the psycho-dynamics and ask: Should a football team *ever* punt?

A year ago at the Hall of Fame reception in Canton, Ohio I found myself sitting between Bill Walsh and Don Shula. I posed this question: In a day when the Bears line up five-wide and Texas Tech passes 60 times a game, are there any fundamental innovations that have not been tried? Walsh supposed someone might try using trick formations for an entire game. Shula twinkled his eyes and said: "Someday there will be a coach who doesn't punt."

Think about all those punts on fourth-and-1, fourth-and-2, fourth-and-3. The average NFL offensive play gains about five yards. Yet game in, game out, coaches boom the punt away on short yardage, handing the most precious article in football -- possession of the ball -- to the other side. Nearly three-quarters of fourth-and-1 attempts succeed, while around one-third of possessions result in scores. Think about those fractions. Go for it four times on fourth-and-1 -- odds are you will keep the ball three times, and three kept possessions each with a one-third chance of a score results in your team scoring once more than it otherwise would have. Punt the ball on all four fourth-and-1s, and you've given the opponents three additional possessions. (It would have gotten one possession anyway when you missed one of your fourth-and-1s.) Those three extra possessions, divided by the one-third chance to score, give the opponent an extra score.

Bottom line? If you face fourth-and-1 four times and punt all four times, your opponent will score once more than it otherwise would have. If you go for it all four times, you will score once more than you otherwise would have. (These are simplified probabilities that do not take into account that the one-score-in-three figure assumes most teams voluntarily end drives by punting on short yardage; subtract those punts, and a possession becomes more valuable because a score is more likely to result.) Few teams face fourth-and-1 four times in a game, but the numbers for fourth-and-2 and fourth-and-3 work out about the same, and most teams do face fourth-and-short several times per game. Probabilities suggest a team that rarely punts will increase its scoring while decreasing its opponents' point totals.

Think I'm crazy? Let's turn to [this 2005 paper by David Romer](#), a professor of economics at the University of California at Berkeley. Romer's work got attention from the sports media because he contends teams facing fourth-and-goal should almost always try for the touchdown. I'm not so sure, and will address that in a later column. (Short version of my counterargument: Field goals are nothing to sneeze at.) But there is gold, absolute gold, in the overlooked later pages of Romer's study. His numbers say that anytime the situation is fourth-and-4 or less, teams should not punt. Romer thinks teams should try for the first down on any fourth-and-4 or less even when in their

own territory. After all, the average play gains almost five yards. On average you will retain possession, and the pluses of that exceeded the minuses of the inevitable failed fourth-down try.

Romer put the opening quarters of all NFL games from 1998 to 2004 into a database, then analyzed when coaches ordered punts, when they went for it, and how these decisions had an impact on field position on subsequent possessions. Here are Romer's three key conclusions. First, inside the opponent's 45, go for a first down on any fourth-and-7 or less, unless a field goal would decide the game. Second, inside the opponent's 33, go for a first down on fourth-and-10 or less, unless a field goal decides. In Romer's sample years there were 1,068 fourth downs in which the above formulas said go for the first down, yet NFL coaches kicked all but 109 times -- meaning they went for it only about 10 percent as often as they should have. Finally, Romer's numbers say that an NFL team should try for the first down on any fourth-and-4 or less, regardless of where the ball is on the field. Of course some fourth-down tries would go down in flames and even create easy scores for the other side. But over the course of a season of rarely punting, Romer maintains, the team that eschewed the punt would score more than it otherwise would, while its opponents would score less.

Suppose an NFL or major-college coach came into a season determined to go for it any time it was fourth-and-4 or less. I don't think a coach should be doctrinaire about this. I'd punt if it was fourth-and-4 inside my 20, and I'd be inclined to punt in the second half if protecting a lead. But otherwise, the coach commits to going for it instead of punting, even if the first few attempts backfire. Surely a strategy of rarely punting would sometimes boomerang, but on balance it could lead to more scoring for your team while depriving the other team of the ball. The strategy could cause exhaustion and panic on the parts of defenses that thought they had done their jobs by forcing fourth down, only to discover your offense had no intention of passively jogging off the field. Teams that rarely punted might pile up big advantages in points and time of possession. If Don Shula's "coach who doesn't punt" appeared on the NFL scene, that coach, Tuesday Morning Quarterback suspects, would revolutionize football. Player talent being equal, that coach might blow the doors off the National Football League.

Which leaves us with the question of whether the coach conjectured by Shula could ever exist. Such a coach would need to be completely unconcerned with the media and owner backlash that would follow a loss caused by a no-punt policy. Such a coach would need to be fearless, and financially independent. Will there ever be such a coach? Tuesday Morning Quarterback wonders. But next time it's fourth-and-3 and you hear the announcers say "now they have to punt," just remember: No, they don't *have* to punt.

In other football news, all hail the United States Saints! That's what TMQ called the team last season during its wanderings, and surely they were the United States Saints last night upon their triumphal return to New Orleans. The emotion of the event was powerful, but the Saints played so well it forced one to wonder: Maybe this is actually a top team. How fitting if the football gods repaid the Saints' horrible 2005 with a wonderful 2006. Between Drew Brees and Reggie Bush looking so, so good while Daunte Culpepper and Mario Williams look so, so bad, there must be serious buyer's remorse today in Miami and Houston. The Saints' early blocked-punt touchdown was not only a sweet play but conformed with TMQ's immutable law of punt defense: Send Eight to Make a Punt Go Backward. As this column has pointed out before, NFL coaches rarely send more than five rushers after the punter. It's blame-shifting: if the coach calls an all-out rush and the kicker is roughed then a coaching decision is blamed, whereas if there's a light rush, a return and the offense fails to move the ball, then the players are blamed. On the first Atlanta punt, New Orleans overloaded the line with eight men in tight, and all eight came: *Thunk!* For the rest of the contest, New Orleans rushed only five. NFL special teams coaches, take heed.

In other news, they were booing in Foxborough as the Patriots left the field at halftime. Sure, New England has won three of the last five Super Bowls. But what have you done for us lately! Meanwhile, Ben Roethlisberger has lost two consecutive games and threw three awful interceptions on Sunday. Now he's only 28-6 as an NFL starter. He's really tailing off! How soon till Steelers fans start booing Roethlisberger?

**Stat of the Week No. 1:** Baltimore and San Diego have outscored their opponents by a combined 110 points.

**Stat of the Week No. 2:** At 1:59 p.m. ET on Sunday, almost an hour into their third game of the season, the Buccaneers scored their first touchdown of the 2006 season.

**Stat of the Week No. 3:** Because the Raiders had a bye, it will be October before Oakland scores its first touchdown of the 2006 season.

**Stat of the Week No. 4:** Seattle is on a 23-4 streak at home.

**Stat of the Week No. 5:** At 11:22 p.m. ET on Sunday, the Broncos allowed their first touchdown of the 2006 season. Considering an overtime, the Denver defense played 12 consecutive quarters without allowing a touchdown.

**Stats of the Week No. 6:** At 8:53 p.m. ET on Monday, the Falcons allowed their first touchdown of the 2006 season.

**Stats of the Week No. 7:** At the end of the first quarter in Seattle, Eli Manning had two interceptions and minus-12 yards passing.

**Stats of the Week No. 8 :** The Giants have not won in Seattle in 25 years.

**Stats of the Week No. 9 :** Stretching back to Jan. 1, when the Buccaneers won the NFC South, Tampa has lost four straight.

**Stats of the Week No. 10 :** The Saints are 3-0 for the first time since 1842.

**Cheerleader of the Week:** Vincent Hendricks of Houston nominates [Summer of the Texans' pep squad](#). According to her team bio, Summer "works as an engineer at NASA's Johnson Space Center." A rocket scientist cheerleader! She also has a VFR pilot's license and is working on her instrument rating. If her team photo is an indication, Summer is not only a rocket scientist cheerleader, she's a *sultry* rocket scientist cheerleader. This really must be the third millennium!

**Sweet Series of Plays of the Week:** On "series" plays, one action sets up another. Game tied at 7, Indianapolis was on its own 31. Marvin Harrison lined up wide right, with tight end Dallas Clark also on the right as a slot receiver, and ran a middle crossing pattern as Clark ran an out; Harrison caught a pass for 38 yards. Two plays later the Colts lined up the same way. This time Harrison came in motion back toward the formation. At the snap, Harrison headed for the middle cross again, but from the inside of Clark, while Clark ran for the sideline and tailback Dominic Rhodes ran a flare right. Two Jax defenders went with Harrison. Two came up to cover Rhodes. That left no one on Clark; Peyton Manning saw this and motioned Clark up the field, where he caught a 30-yard touchdown pass.

**Sweet Play of the Week No. 2:** Trailing Pittsburgh 17-14 early in the fourth quarter, Cincinnati faced fourth-and-1 on its own 30. Following professor David Romer's advice, the Bengals went for it and converted. Cincinnati did not score on the possession, but Marvin Lewis' decision to go for it on his own 30 communicated to his charges that he was challenging them to win the game, which they did.

**Sweet Play of the Week No. 3:** Leading 3-0, Denver had third-and-1 on the New England 32 with 56 seconds remaining in the first half. Normally it's best to rush on short-yardage downs: but if you're going to pass, throw the home run, not some dinky three-yard out. The Broncos play-faked, Javon Walker went deep up the right sideline single-covered and caught the touchdown that made it 10-0 at the half. Flying Elvii defensive backs -- there were only 56 seconds remaining, why were you surprised Denver went to the end zone?

**Sweet Play of the Week No. 4:** On a 23-yard completion to Muhsin Muhammad, Rex Grossman of the Bears play-faked left, then play-faked right, then threw. You don't often see two play-fakes on the same down. But was this pass-wacky unit really the Chicago Bears? At one point in the game, the Bears' coaches had called 26 passes versus eight rushes.

**Sweet 'N' Sour Player of the Week:** Grossman was the epitome of Sweet 'N' Sour. His touchdown pass won the game as the clock ticked toward all-naughts. But on the first snap of the fourth quarter, the Ming Ding Xiong ("Bears whose outcomes are decided by fate" in Chinese) having a first-and-10 on their 12, Grossman sprinted 15 yards backward into his own end zone. About to be tackled, he threw a nutty heave-ho that was intercepted by Minnesota and returned for a touchdown. Yes: He threw an interception to avoid a safety!

**Sour Play of the Week:** A TMQ maxim holds that sometimes all a team needs to do is run the up the middle for no gain, and everything will be fine. Leading 24-23, City of Tampa faced third-and-5 on its own 25 at the two-minute warning, with Carolina down to two timeouts. The Bucs' coaches called a deep pass that clangled incomplete, politely stopping the clock for the Panthers -- who won the game on a long field goal with seven seconds remaining. Had Tampa simply rushed up the middle for no gain, grinding the clock, Carolina likely would have run out of time.

**Sour Play of the Week No. 2:** Already down 14-0 in the first quarter, Jersey/A had Seattle with first-and-goal on the Giants' 4. Darrell Jackson lined up slot-left; a Seattle receiver went in motion left, beyond Jackson; Shaun Alexander ran a flare left; all the Giants' defenders on that side ignored Jackson as he ran a simple turn-in for the touchdown that made it 20-0. Throughout the game, Jersey/A's pass defense seemed flummoxed that Seattle, which last season almost always had either a fullback or tight end on the field, was showing four wide receivers -- though four-receiver sets are now commonplace even in high school. And do you think the Blue Men Group, defending NFC champions yet shafted by the league out of a prime time appearance in the season's first month, were jacked up to at least be on national television?

**Sour Play of the Week No. 3:** Trailing 14-0, Houston had Washington facing a second-and-6 on the Moo Cows' 30 with nine seconds remaining in the first half. The Redskins' coaches called a draw to improve their field-goal position. The Houston defense allowed Clinton Portis to run 30 yards untouched for the touchdown.

**Sour Play of the Week No. 4:** The Browns led the Ravens 14-12 with 3:28 remaining and had second-and-goal on the Baltimore 4. Run twice and the icing touchdown is likely; if stuffed, take a field goal for a five-point lead at about the two-minute warning. Instead the Browns' coaches call a pass. Charlie Frye heave-hoes -- *Aaaaaaiiiiiiiyyyyyyyyeeee!* I can't look! Sometimes the best play a quarterback can make is zinging the ball out of bounds. Had Frye simply zung this one out of bounds, Cleveland likely would have won.

**Tuesday Morning Quarterback In the News:** Reader Joe Abraham of New York City reports he attended, at NYU Law School, a colloquium featuring [Paul Clement, Solicitor General of the United States](#). During his talk, the Solicitor General of the United States referred to hindsight as

"Tuesday morning quarterbacking." Surely Clement spoke in capital letters and said "Tuesday Morning Quarterbacking."

**Tuesday Morning Quarterback In the News No. 2:** Last week Eric Schmidt, the CEO of Google, called my book "The Progress Paradox" "a book you must read" because it "tells the truth about how the United States really is today." That's pretty exciting. [Details are here.](#)

**Google CEO Has Good Taste in Literature:** "The Progress Paradox" first argues that nearly every aspect of Western life is improving, then speculates about why "life gets better but people feel worse." [A recent study](#) by researchers including Daniel Kahneman, a Nobel Prize winner, and Alan Kruger, one of the leading names in behavioral economics, adds new detail on that question. The study found that the well-off are no happier than others; that as income rises, so does tension and anger; that "people exaggerate the contribution of income to happiness."

Kahneman, Krueger and their collaborators also offer a vital insight -- that happiness comes from choosing time over money, but most Americans choose money over time. "Leisure is better for happiness than increased income," they argue, supposing that time spent in travel, having new experiences, relaxing, hiking, reading, or simply looking up at the stars is more important to our sense of well-being than a new car or impressive house. Unless you are in a bad financial situation, Kahneman and Krueger recommend you spend less time working, accept somewhat lower income, and use your freed hours to experience life. Barbara Bush memorably said that no one on his or her deathbed has ever regretted not staying later at the office, while many regret failing to spend more time with family and friends.

I'll add another suggestion on why time is more important to happiness than money: Because time is far more precious. Money that has been used up can be replaced; you can always get at least some additional money, and in principle can get huge amounts of additional money. Your time on Earth, on the other hand, is limited and irreplaceable. You might add somewhat to your time on Earth by taking care of your health -- and that's an excellent idea, but there are no guarantees you won't be hit by a bus anyway. We all must surrender some of our time for work to acquire income. But those who obsessively chase maximum material possessions give up something precious and fleeting, namely time, in order to acquire something that cannot make them happy, namely money.

**Favre Moratorium Call Renewed:** It's good that the storied Green Bay Packers have a W. But midway through their game this Sunday, after completing a routine pass for a first down, Brett Favre jumped into the air and began pumping his fists as if he'd just won the Super Bowl. A year ago, Tuesday Morning Quarterback proposed a moratorium on press coverage of Favre, who's a first-ballot Hall of Famer but at this point ridiculously over-emphasized by the sports media. Any other player who jumped into the air and celebrated wildly after a routine completion would be mocked. The standards that apply to everyone else should also apply to Favre.

**Stop Me Before -- Hey, It Worked!** Both J.P. Losman fumbles, the decisive downs of the Buffalo-Jersey/B collision, came during six-man Jets blitzes. Then again, Rex Grossman's game-winning late touchdown pass at Minnesota came against the six-blitz.

**Next One Will Have Seven Jewel-Encrusted Platinum Blades Forged In by Elves Beneath a Fog-Shrouded Mountain:** First there were two-bladed razors, then three, then four-bladed, then the new Gillette razor with five blades in front and one in back. Now Schick has upped the ante further with [a razor with four titanium blades](#). Disposable titanium -- only in America!

**We're All Professionals Here:** Leading 16-14 at the 2:03 mark of the fourth quarter, St. Louis had first-and-10 on its own 34, and Arizona down to one timeout. Running up the middle three times probably ices the game. Instead Les Mouflons try to -- well, your guess is as good as mine about

what they were trying to do, but the result was a fumble recovered by the Cardinals. Now it's two snaps later, Arizona has first-and-10 on the Rams' 18 with 1:46 remaining and St. Louis is out of timeouts. The Cards are in position for a short field goal to win the game. Instead the Cardinals try to -- well, your guess is as good as mine about what they were trying to do, but the result was a fumble recovered by the Rams. Game over.

**Forget Pro Wrestling, Give Me the Babes of Norwegian Curling:** Curling has always struck TMQ as a sedentary activity for senior citizens or Canadians, and there may be only a technical difference between those categories. Reader J. K. Hoversholm of Bergen, Norway, reports that Norwegian curling matches have begun to feature scantily clad, tall, blonde curling babes who rival the recent U.S. Open ballgirls. Here, in Norwegian, is an advert for a [curling-babe pinup calendar](#). Proceeds go to charity!

**Buck-Buck-Brawckkkkkkk:** Jacksonville trailed Indianapolis 14-7 at the end of the third quarter, and faced fourth-and-1 on the Colts' 31. Jack Del Rio sent out the place-kicker for a 48-yard attempt. But Josh Scobee had already missed from 24, and Scobee is not a distance kicker, going into the game having hit only 11-of-19 from the 40 to 49. Plus in this circumstance, if Jax goes for the first down and misses, the Colts get the ball on the 31 or so; a field goal miss gives the ball to Indianapolis on the 38. The kick failed, and TMQ wrote the words "game over" in his notebook.

**Miss Rogue, Your CT Scan Is Back. Would You Have Any Idea What This Internal Organ Is?** I want to know what kind of vitamins Magneto takes! They must be good vitamins because his powers increase movie-by-movie. In the first "X-Men" flick, Magneto could control ferrous metals within about 100 feet. Captured at the movie's end, he was imprisoned in a plastic cell reached by a 100-foot plastic bridge; the guards in the watch-room beyond the bridge were using metal, but Magneto's powers did not reach that far. In the second X flick, Magneto was able to snatch the crippled, plummeting X Jet out of the air and save it; the plane started decelerating hundreds of feet above the ground, indicating Magneto has increased his range. In the third movie, this summer's "The Last Stand," Magneto was able to levitate the entire 4,200-foot main span of the Golden Gate Bridge. Set aside what the main span of the Golden Gate Bridge must weigh -- it's nearly a mile long, meaning Magneto can project his power a much greater distance than previously. You can check the [Golden Gate Bridge's live webcam](#) to see if any mutant armies are crossing.

The X-Men movies have been the most entertaining Hollywood superhero stuff in years. In order to rationalize another sequel, I will even swallow everyone coming back to life, though coming-back-to-life is sci-fi's worst cliché. Obviously *X III* sets up Professor Xavier coming back to life. My guess is everyone comes back. Immediately after the movie my 11-year-old, Spenser, pointed out Logan never found Scott's body, just his glasses, while if Jean Grey is more powerful than Professor X and the Prof. could teleport his consciousness an instant before physical death, why couldn't Jean teleport hers too? *The Last Stand* was the abbreviated title for movie posters. The full title was *Don't Worry News Corporation Shareholders, There Is No Way This Actually Is the Last Stand*.

Of course, one must suspend disbelief when it comes to superheroes. But what TMQ always wonders about X-Men, Superman, the Flash and the rest is: Where are the body organs that support their powers? I'm willing to believe a superhero can fly, but where is the organ that provides propulsion? Supposedly Earth's yellow star activated in Kal-El powers that he would not have had under the red sun of Krypton. But still, some internal organ must produce the energy for his heat vision and the thrust for his flying and so on. In "Superman Returns," Supe can even fly faster than light, a power he lacked in the comics; apparently some organ too small to even bulge under his skin propels him to warp speed. Really, there must be *some* physical point of origin for a superhero's power. Storm must have a body organ that projects force fields that control weather.

Iceman must have a body organ that can reduce temperature very rapidly, plus shed heat so Bobby doesn't boil. Where in their physiques are these organs?

Beyond that, the X-Men premise defies scientific thinking about natural selection, which holds that new organs develop very slowly across hundreds of generations. Assume some body organ can allow Shadowcat to walk through walls or Colossus to change his skin to steel: it's unimaginable such an organ could arise *de novo* in a single mutation. Many generations of relatively minor mutations would be required before a novel body organ could come into full functionality. Biologists from Richard Goldschmidt of the early 20th century to Stephen Jay Gould of the late 20th have speculated there is an as-yet-undiscovered natural mechanism that enables accelerated evolution. Otherwise it's hard to imagine how creatures lived through long chains of generations with still-evolving incomplete organs, since incomplete organs should be a fitness disadvantage and thus render their possessors less likely to reproduce. Unless the X-Men are an argument for intelligent design! The intelligent-design crowd believes natural selection can produce minor alterations in existing forms but cannot produce new organs or new species; a higher intellect controls that. The sudden, drastic evolutionary jumps depicted in the X-Men movies and comics sure feel like intelligent design. In fact one of the most interesting X-Men, Nightcrawler, asserts that the very rapid evolution he and his friends experience could not occur naturally and must be the result of God intervening for reasons not yet known.

Left unresolved by *X III* is whether Mystique, played by the scrumptious Rebecca Romijn, was nude. In her blue mutant form, Mystique seemed to be wearing a blue thong bikini. But when Romijn lost her powers, her blue skin turned the Caucasian shade and she collapsed to the ground naked. Did her bikini lose its powers too? In another scene, Wolverine's shirt was torn by projectiles that ripped his flesh. His miraculous powers healed the flesh \_ and when we saw Logan an instant later, his shirt looked brand new. Was he wearing a jerkin of self-healing wool made from mutant sheep?

**Shaun Alexander Untouched Touchdown Run of the Week:** Last season, Alexander had 15 untouched touchdown runs. On Sunday, Alexander went *up the middle* for a touchdown and was not touched until after he scored.

**This Fulfills My Obligation to Say Something About the Dolphins-Titans Game:** Miami trailing the Flaming Thumbtacks 7-3 in the third quarter, the Dolphins reached first-and-goal. Miami coaches sent Jason Taylor in as a tight end. Taylor never got the ball, but his presence seemed to discombobulate the Tennessee defense; Daunte Culpepper scrambled for a touchdown.

**Hidden Plays:** Hidden plays are ones that never make highlight reels, but stop or sustain drives. With Cincinnati and Pittsburgh tied at 7, the Steelers faced third-and-8 on the Bengals' 23. Robert Geathers sacked Ben Roethlisberger back to the 30, making the field-goal attempt a dicey proposition in gusting winds. Kick no good, and the missed three points would come back to haunt Pittsburgh in the second half of its loss.

**We're Up by 21? Let's Pass!** From the point at which it was Philadelphia 24, San Francisco 3, through the remainder of the game, Eagles' coaches called 10 passes and eight rushes. The game ran long, three hours and 22 minutes, in part because the Squared Sevens, way behind, kept throwing incomplete passes in the fourth quarter and stopping the clock while the Eagles, way ahead, kept throwing incomplete passes in the fourth quarter and stopping the clock.

**This Fulfills My Obligation to Say Something About the Bills-Jets Game:** Buffalo compiled 200 yards more offense than Jersey/B but committed three turnovers and missed three fourth-down conversions, a missed fourth-down being equivalent to a blocked kick; the Jets committed no

turnovers and converted their only fourth-down try. The Bills had drives that reached the opponent's 1, 18, 19, 28 and 35, yet netted just two field goals.

**Cheerleader Professionalism Watch:** In the cheer context, "professionalism" means skin or at least skin tight: cheerleaders who are scantily attired increase their team's odds of victory. Robert Betlinski of New Haven, Conn., was among many readers to note that although kickoff temperature for the Broncos-at-Patriots date was a cozy 68 degrees F (20.16 C), the New England cheer-babes came out dressed in COATS. Needless to say, New England was defeated. Phil Kerlee of Los Gatos, Calif., notes that for the first half of the Giants-at-Seahawks contest, the Sea Gals sported their pleasingly revealing new "hello, sailor" outfits. Seattle led 35-3 at intermission. For the second half, Seattle cheerleaders switched to "the kind of jogging sweats your grandmother wears," Kerlee reports. In that half, the Giants outscored Seattle 27-7.

**All This Assumes Satan Is At Least 35 Years of Age and Was Born in the United States:** Last week Jerry Falwell said fundamentalists would work harder to defeat a Hillary Clinton presidential candidacy than if Lucifer were running for president. On an *exclusive* basis, TMZ has obtained this transcript of a recent K Street meeting between Satan and his campaign consultant.

CONSULTANT: Let's go over these focus-group results. First there's the name thing. Voters like casual -- Bill Clinton, Bob Dole. "Satan" sounds kind of stiff and formal. Do you have a first name?

SATAN: I have many names. Abaddon, Ahriman, Apollyon, Asmodeus, Azazel...

CONSULTANT: Gotta be informal.

SATAN: My friends call me Steve.

CONSULTANT: Steve Satan. That's great, sounds like the guy next door. Now let's be honest, you have negatives. For example, you want everyone to suffer horribly for all eternity. How am I supposed to sell that to voters?

SATAN: We've made a lot of changes in hell -- now we're customer-conscious. If you're willing to sell your soul, we pledge to have the demon there with the contract that day or your first month in hell is pain-free. Plus we've got a mission statement and a philosophy of Total Quality Torment.

CONSULTANT: Now your position on the issues. Iraq war?

SATAN: Strongly in favor.

CONSULTANT: Universal health care insurance?

SATAN: Strongly opposed.

CONSULTANT: Immigration?

SATAN: Let 'em die in the desert.

CONSULTANT: United Nations?

SATAN: Don't mention that I run it.

CONSULTANT: Education reform?

SATAN: Everyone should learn Latin. I hate it when people come to hell and don't even speak our language.

CONSULTANT: The television coach will be here in a minute to work with you. We need to eliminate the hissing.

SATAN: Sorry. I do that when I'm nervous. Guess I shouldn't have quit smoking!

CONSULTANT: Fund-raising is going well. I hope you don't object to taking money from Persian Gulf oil sheiks.

SATAN: Of course not. But do you have any qualms about working for me?

CONSULTANT: Qualms! I'm a political consultant.

**Matt Millen Incompetence Update:** Keep your eye on speed receiver David Kircus of Denver, who had two nice catches against New England. Kircus spent his first three seasons at Detroit but barely got on the field for the Lions. Detroit was obsessed with its multiple first-round, big-school receivers and ignored this low-drafted gent from Grand Valley State. Don't be surprised if Kircus turns out better than wide receivers the Lions have recently blown high first-round choices on.

**Single Worst Play of the 2006 Season So Far:** Trailing 24-3, the Niners had third-and-goal on the Eagles' 1. Frank Gore fumbled and Nesharim defensive tackle Mike Patterson returned the rock 98 yards, effectively ending the game. The bad thing about this play was not that instead of making it 24-10, San Francisco trailed 31-3. The bad thing was not that Patterson, who's heavyset, huffed and puffed and had to jog the final 30 yards. The bad thing was not that sportscasters thought it was funny that a highly paid professional athlete is too heavy to sprint 100 yards, rather than asking what message about fitness and healthy diet this sends to the young. The reason this was the Single Worst Play of the 2006 Season So Far was that the Niners failed to chase Patterson down. Watch the replay; Alex Smith is the sole red jersey visible. Vernon Davis and Gore were hurt on the play and couldn't run, but that still leaves a *Ticonderoga*-class defensive tackle plodding the length of the field and eight of 11 Niners not catching him. According to the [Game Book](#), this play lasted 21 seconds, allowing plenty of time to catch Patterson. San Francisco 49ers, you have committed the Single Worst Play of the 2006 Season So Far.

**Plus Houston Is Last in Total Defense. The Williams Pick Is Really Looking Good:** On Washington's first touchdown, a sweep left by Ladell Betts, first overall draft pick Mario Williams, playing right end for Houston, was blocked out of the play and practically off the screen by Mike Sellers, a reserve tight end. On Washington's second touchdown, a flare pass left to Antwaan Randle El, Williams was again at right end and again blocked out of the play and practically off the screen.

**Please, Announcers, Learn the Distinction Between an End-Around and a Reverse:** Watching a highlight of receiver Marty Booker of Miami running against Tennessee, novice sportscaster Jerome Bettis exclaimed, "Reverse!" It was an end-around, not a reverse: Daunte Culpepper faked up the middle, then handed off to Booker coming around. The ball never changed direction. Announcers, here's the easy way to tell if it's a reverse: count handoffs. An end-around requires one handoff. A reverse requires two handoffs, one to make the ball go in Direction A, another to make it go in Direction B. The very rare double reverse requires three handoffs, so the ball ends up going back in Direction A.

Last night my TMQ e-mail box got more than 400 messages from people watching "Monday Night Football," as the United States Saints ran a reverse and the MNF crew called it a double reverse. Drew Brees faked up the middle, then handed to Reggie Bush running left; Bush handed to Devery Henderson running right for the touchdown. That's one change of direction (Bush handing to Henderson), making it a reverse. Count the handoffs: two handoffs mean the play is a reverse. For the play to have been a double reverse, a third handoff would have been needed, from Henderson to someone running left, Bush's original direction. Danny Chamberlin of Memphis, Tennessee was among many readers to point out that Mike Tirico and Tony Kornheiser erroneously described the play as a "double reverse," while former quarterback Joe Theismann correctly described it as a

"reverse." Mike and Tony, you're not alone. Adele Stannard of Springfield, Ore., noted that even the official [Game Book](#) erroneously describes the play thusly: "Double-reverse handoff Brees, D. to Bush, R. to Henderson, D." Hey official Game Book, that's two handoffs and thus cannot be a double reverse! See the entry at 3:04 of the first quarter.

**Maybe the Seattle Cheerleaders Outfits Explain All This:** The Seahawks certainly made a statement against the Giants, yet coaching decisions on both sides were puzzling. Seattle leading 35-0 with three seconds remaining in the first half, Jersey/A on the Hawks' 28, Tom Coughlin ordered a field goal. Sure a 28-yard touchdown play is unlikely, but haven't you seen a lot of touchdowns that long or longer? By kicking, Coughlin ran up the white flag. The Giants might as well have left and gotten blueberry-almond martinis with crumpets. (Note: Seattle insider reference.) With the halftime margin 35-3, to prevail in the second half the Giants would have needed to match the greatest comeback in pro football history, and that greatest-ever comeback was by a home team. Jersey/A was the visitor; scoring a touchdown before halftime was, in practical terms, the Giants' last hope. Coughlin seemed to be motivated by avoiding a goose-egg, so that when his performance review comes up at the end of the season, one of the strikes against him will not be, "You got shut out in Seattle." But coaches are not supposed to be maximizing their career prospects, they should try everything possible to win. When Jeremy Shockey said the Giants were "outcoached," this is one of the decisions he was referring to, and Shockey is right.

On the other side of the ball, it's Blue Men Group 42, G-Persons 10 with 9:53 in the fourth quarter. *What in heck is Matt Hasselbeck doing on the field?* Why in heck are the Seahawks still passing? Hasselbeck tosses an interception, the Giants score quickly; Hasselbeck trots back out onto the field and throws another interception the Giants return for a touchdown. Suddenly it's Hawks 42, Giants 24 and now a prudent coach leaves the starters in. Starting on its first snap of the fourth quarter, had Seattle done nothing but rush up the middle for no gain, Jersey/A's semi-comeback would not have happened, and Seattle's starters could have taken seats.

**No Wonder Hedge Funds Are Secretive -- They Don't Want You to Know Their Actual Returns:** Last week Amaranth Advisors, a hedge fund that had been boasting of spectacular 25 percent returns, admitted it lost \$6 billion of investors' money in high-risk trading. Tuesday Morning Quarterback has done several items in recent years on the amusing fact that hedge funds, the trendy investment vehicle of the rich -- hedge funds generally require a \$1 million minimum account, and because of that are exempt from many Securities and Exchange Commission regulations intended to protect average investors -- often produce returns no better than the plain-Jane mutual funds anyone can join. Recently Jonathan Clements of the Wall Street Journal, who's become a first-rate columnist on finance, noted that hedge fund managers typically claim to have realized a 16.5 percent annual return in the past decade, besting the 11.6 percent return of the Standard & Poor's 500 on which the most common class of mutual funds is based. But Clements shows the hedge fund claims have been doctored, Enron-style, by doubling-counting successful investments while not recording losses. Adjust for this, [according to calculations](#) by Roger Ibbotson and Peng Chen of a leading capital analysis firm, and hedge funds returned 9 percent annually in the last decade. That is, the snazzy hedge funds of the rich finished behind S&P mutual funds. And hedge funds crash; plain-Jane mutual funds may decline in value if the market declines, but almost never simply lose their investors' capital. Hey millionaires, just call the 800 numbers of Fidelity, T. Rowe Price or any reputable public investment firm. You'll get a better deal.

**NFL in Iran Update:** Wow look at those headliner games Sunday -- Cincinnati at Pittsburgh, Jacksonville at Indianapolis. CBS had the rights to both, and both turned out to be dazzling contests. Which game did CBS show in Washington, D.C., where TMQ lurks? Neither. CBS showed our

nation's capital Baltimore at Cleveland, such a woofers that my dog barked when I turned the television on. (Because CBS and Fox alternate doubleheader weekends, CBS had the contractual right to air one game this Sunday; in Washington the network exercised its right in the late slot, as Baltimore at Cleveland started late.) One of TMQ's core complaints about the NFL is that the league spares no expense to produce fabulous games, and then makes it impossible for much of the country to watch the fabulous games, owing to that monopoly that makes it impossible for millions to purchase NFL Sunday Ticket, and to programming choices by local network affiliates. If only I lived in Iran! No one in Washington, D.C., saw the Steelers-Bengals playoff rematch. But Tehran saw this contest, as Middle East TV [beamed the game to Iran](#), kicking off at 8 p.m. Tehran time.

**Take Him Out! Take Him Out!** That's what TMQ and my 11-year-old, Spenser, began to chant when Mark Brunell was 22-of-22, Washington leading 28-7 in the fourth quarter against the hapless Texans. Take him out so he finishes with a perfect game! Naturally, Brunell's next pass attempt clanged incomplete.

**Obscure College Score of the Week:** Kansas Wesleyan 3, University of Saint Mary 0. There were 18 total first downs and 17 total punts. Located at three campuses in Kansas, the University of Saint Mary boasts it is "consistently included in the U.S. News and World Report's **"Error! Hyperlink reference not valid."** edition." That's like me saying, "My writing is consistently compared to that of Carlos Fuentes." ("Year in, year out, Easterbrook is nothing like Fuentes.") University of Saint Mary is "included" in the current U.S. News ranking: You'd just rather not know where.

**Obscure College Score of the Week No. 2:** Adams State 34, New Mexico Highlands 17. Located amidst glorious mountain scenery in Alamosa, Colo., the student center at Adams State [rents rock-climbing shoes](#) for \$30 per semester or \$3 per use. Regrettably the cheerleaders are the Spirit Squad, not the Eves.

**"Gimme a Pi! Gimme an Avogadro's Number! Gimme a Scalar Boson!"** Last week TMQ marveled that not only does MIT have a football team, the team has a 6-foot-5, 268-pound tight end. Now reader David Bone of Dickson, Tenn., reports that MIT [even has cheerleaders](#). Attractive, athletic women at MIT? This must be an Admissions Office screw-up.

**TMQ Immutable Laws in College:** Leading 13-7, the woebegone University of Colorado was within 46 seconds of a monster upset of ninth-ranked Georgia, which faced third-and-5 on the Colorado 20. It's a seven-man blitz, and you know without having to be told who won the game. TMQ also asks, in desperation situations, *Where, oh where, might the pass go?* Maybe up the field! Leading 15-10, Boston College had North Carolina State down to 21 ticks of the clock, ball on the B.C. 34. *Where, oh where, might the pass go?* Yet John Dunlap was able to get behind the Eagles' defense in the corner of the end zone for the winning touchdown; he was singled deep with nary a safety in sight. There were 21 seconds left, N.C. State had to get a touchdown, why didn't Boston College have half its defenders standing in the end zone?

**Running Up the Score Watch:** Many readers, including Seth Mundorff of Pittsburgh, noted that Bridgeport Central High beat Bassick High by 56-0, setting up the first test case of the new Connecticut regulation that sanctions coaches whose teams win by more than 50. Bridgeport coach Dave Cadelina filed an appeal and was not suspended. Cadelina argued that he could have avoided trouble by ordering his players to stand aside and let Bassick run the length of the field to score on the game's final play; and if an absurd act satisfies a rule, then the rule must be absurd. That's pretty solid logic. The 50-point restriction was designed to stop one bad-egg Connecticut coach who routinely tried to humiliate opponents with huge victory margins, but only a small number of coaches are such poor sports. Connecticut should switch to the "running clock" rule used by many

states, and recommended by the National Federation of High Schools. It's used in Maryland, my state \_ whenever a team leads by 35 or more in the second half, the clock does not stop for incompletions, penalties or ball out of bounds. The result is that winning margins of greater than 40 points are rare in states that use this system. The running clock allows the better team to produce proof of its superiority, plus to play its second- and third-string, without ridiculous final tallies that suggest bad sportsmanship. Connecticut, switch to this rule.

**New England Gang of 11 to Meet Seattle Bourgeois Reactionaries:** The Patriots-Seahawks 2007 preseason game in Beijing, announced over the weekend, will be played in Workers Stadium.

**Reader Animadversion:** Got a complaint or a deeply held grievance? Write me at [TMQ\\_ESPN@yahoo.com](mailto:TMQ_ESPN@yahoo.com). Include your real name and the name of your hometown, and I may quote you by name unless you instruct me otherwise. Note: giving your hometown improves your odds of being quoted.

**Next Week:** The Archangel Gabriel files for the New Hampshire primary, refuses to tell reporters whether he really has 600 wings.

**Wednesday, September 27, 2006**

TMQ Nation fires back

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By Gregg Easterbrook

**Jared Weissbrot of Baltimore** writes, "Faithfully read the column, wish I could read from a printable version. Coworkers always seem to walk in when the cheerleaders are in view." **Ben Brewer of Boston** says, "I print your columns out and read them on my commute home. I start reading the moment I sit down on the train and usually I'm finishing when the train pulls into my station." Hmmm ... sounds like a 45-minute train ride. **Dan Lennander of Ames, Iowa** adds, "In previous years you provided a link to a version of TMQ that was just text. Now I need to copy and paste into a Word document and delete unwanted pictures so I can enjoy TMQ without the crazy yellow background that gives me a headache." Readers, your wish is my command. Scan to the bottom of the column and select PRINT. From there, either print the column complete with cheerleader swimsuit photos that are certain someday to be displayed prominently in the Smithsonian -- the "Tuesday Morning Quarterback Collection," ah yes, I can see it now -- or select PRINT WITHOUT IMAGES. The latter button allows printing of a text-only version suitable for reading during important meetings. Also, if you want Tuesday Morning Quarterback on your screen at the office without arousing suspicion, go to the PRINT WITHOUT IMAGES option and simply read that.

**Malan Blum of Calgary, Alberta** asks of the X-Men, "If Professor Xavier's abilities are produced by mutated genes and he teleported his consciousness into another person's body, how could he retain his powers?" Malan, I am sure your question will not be answered in the next sequel. The next sequel is apparently going to be mainly about Wolverine in any case. Maybe about his sensitive side.

**Chuck Clark of Columbus, Ohio** writes of my never-punt concept, "I believe we only have to wait until a coach from the Madden Generation is hired by a college or professional team before we will see one who never punts. I don't know anyone who has played the Madden series of video games who hasn't tried to play without punting. I think it is only a matter of time before someone tries this on a real field." **Steve Kline, Jr.** writes, "One thing you didn't mention in your analysis of not punting is that the team that never punted would have more available plays to run on third down. We all know how pass-wacky coaches are on third down, even third and short. But, if a coach knew that he was almost always going for it on fourth down, many more running plays would become an option on third and five, even third and long. This would make third down harder to defense as teams could not assume the offense was going to pass."

**Raul Ortega of Nelson Township, Mich.** adds, "Imagine how much less predictable NFL playcalling would be if plays were called with the understanding that there are four chances to get 10 yards, rather than three." **Kyle Scribner of Nashua, N.H.** offers, "The always-going-for-it-on-fourth-if-under-5-yards-needed theory appears to make mathematical sense under current conditions. The key, I think, is in what goes unstated in your article, that is, that 'the average NFL play gains five yards' occurs within the traditional football atmosphere. Never punting is not the traditional football atmosphere and average gain of plays conducted within the suggested new non-punting atmosphere might be less than five yards. I bet that the more widespread going for it on fourth down were to become, the more that four-yards-or-under rule would shrink, as average gain per play declined."

Tuesday Morning Quarterback lamented that the fabulous Steelers-Bengals contest, a playoff rematch and the obvious marquee game of the early Sunday slot, was shown in the capital of Iran but not the capital of the United States. (Washington, D.C. saw Baltimore at Cleveland. Woof woof! Here boy!) **Michael Manning of Portland, Ore.** writes from Seoul that he watched the Steelers-Bengals game live on South Korean television. Manning adds, "That I was able to see this game while TMQ could not is a total joke." Not to me!

**Rob Eisler of Regina, Saskatchewan** was among many frostback readers to note, "The Saskatchewan Roughriders versus British Columbia Lions game went into overtime. In CFL overtime teams alternate possessions, as in United States college games, but unlike in the United States, in the CFL a punt kicked through the end zone scores a single point. The Roughriders had the first possession, which ended on a missed field goal. That meant on B.C.'s possession, one point would win the game. The Lions had the wind at their backs and the coach called a punt on *first down* to try for the single. Even the curling-loving Canadian football gods would not put up with such a thing. The punter shanked it, the kick was returned out of the end zone, and the Riders won in the second overtime." Rob, there's a lesson here. The lesson is that this is the sort of thing that happens when a football team is named the "Lions."

**Bryce Christensen of Salt Lake City** wrote, "Isn't it possible to have a reverse with a single handoff, or a double-reverse with only two exchanges, if the play initially looks like a quarterback sweep? Especially if the QB has a reputation as a runner and sells the keeper reasonably well?" Many readers including **Alicia Krupen of Keuka, N.Y.** noted that when Donovan McNabb was at Syracuse, he often ran a sprint-out one way with a flip handoff to a receiver going the other way, which could qualify as a true reverse because the ball changed direction, even though there was only one handoff.

On why rising income does not cause rising happiness, **Ramesses Surban of San Diego** reminds us of the 1998 Notorious B.I.G. song "Mo Money, Mo Problems," which contains this couplet: "It's like the more money we come across/The more problems we see."

**Michael Thiede of Maple Grove, Minn.** notes that the "Briscoe High School" team in the Nike commercial has Michael Vick, Brian Urlacher and LaDainian Tomlinson, yet trails 14-10 with 10 seconds to play. He asks, "How on God's green earth is this team getting beat?" TMQ adds -- especially since the team has the adult versions of these players, not their teen selves. The commercial asks you to believe that a team with several Pro Bowl players in their primes would need an improbable last-second Hail Mary to defeat high schoolers. It's video nonsense of course, but nonsense of a high order. And Tuesday Morning Quarterback wonders about those NFL stars, plus Don Shula -- did they actually meet at a high school to film the commercial, or is the entire thing computer-generated with faces digitally imposed? If any reader knows, please advise.

Last Feb. 18, gamma radiation from a distant supernova that exploded 470 million years ago reached Earth. Had the explosion occurred in our galaxy, the radiation would have been many orders of magnitude stronger. I opined that had the supernova been within the Milky Way, "Life on Earth would have ended February 18th." **Dave Maloney of Candia, N.H.** counters, "Had the explosion happened in our galaxy, it would not have been so far away. So life on Earth would have ended 470 million years ago."

**Travis Rathert of Vancouver, British Columbia** notes something that struck your columnist too. In the new Superman movie, when Supe in the last reel finally figures out something TOTALLY OBVIOUS, that Lois Lane's little boy is his son, he slips into the sleeping child's room and says, "The son becomes the father and the father becomes the son." This, Rathert asserts, is

incomprehensible gibberish regardless of your planet of origin. On other Hollywood points that make no sense, **Thomas Lamme of Houston** adds, "In 'Batman Begins,' the final story line hinges on the Caped Crusader's ability to stop a machine that is vaporizing Gotham City's water supply by disrupting the molecular structure of water. Yet all the people around, who are 60 percent water, are unaffected by the sinister machine. How did this story line make it through an entire production of the movie without somebody asking the obvious question?" Superhero note: TMQ recommends the fun new book "Up, Up and Oy Vey" by Simcha Weinstein, which speculates on the religious beliefs of comic book characters.

TMQ noted that in the Stargate shows, the Air Force has built four enormous faster-than-light starships using plans supplied by friendly aliens. I scoffed that this was impossible from a financial standpoint: "Hundreds of billions of dollars would be involved, and not even Congress could lose track of that much money." **Tom Hitchcock of Costa Mesa, Calif.** counters, "It has been shown that our government can lose hundreds of billions of dollars." He points out that [at this 2001 press conference](#), Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld said the Pentagon could not account for \$2.3 trillion in past spending. One recent Department of Defense internal auditor's report said \$1.1 trillion in expenses were "unsupported or improper." They can't even agree on how many trillions they've lost -- but trust them, they're the experts? Hitchcock asserts that the Pentagon has lost or hidden more than enough to finance a crash program of starcruiser construction.

On the running-up-the-score front, **Danny Lawhon of Saint Joseph, Mo.** notes that two weeks after beating Lincoln 78-0, Central Missouri State University lost 14-10 to Washburn. That same weekend Pittsburg of Kansas, which had beaten Panhandle State 87-0, lost 48-35 to Missouri Western. The football gods grind slow, but they grind exceedingly small. Bully teams that run up the score on weak opponents not only are engaging in poor sportsmanship; they are setting themselves up for a fall when they meet an equal opponent.

TMQ wondered if two bolts, recently let go by astronauts during spacewalks, may someday pose deadly hazards to starships, since at extreme speeds collisions with even tiny amounts of matter can cause huge detonations. Many readers including **Chelsea Ravenwood of San Francisco** countered that two bolts are hardly the only problem: There are an estimated [9,000 pieces of space junk](#) orbiting Earth, much dating to Moon-race days. By the time the first starcruiser makes the first jump to quadraspace, the junk should be gone, says **Erin Weaver of Champaign, Ill.** Objects in low-Earth orbit gradually lose speed and fall back into the atmosphere -- the space station occasionally fires small rockets to prevent this. So presumably by the time quadradrive ships exist, all bolts, fairings, shrouds and Tang containers will have burned up in the atmosphere on their own. Space agencies are now working to avoid adding new junk to the debris.

Last week's column lauded Bucknell for doing that which so many universities pretend is out of the question -- playing Division I sports and graduating athletes. **Kevin Blackwell of Catonsville, Md.,** writes, "I am a former basketball player at Bucknell, and have been associated with the university since 1981. My junior and senior years, we were 43-16 and had nine engineering majors on the team. In my 25 years involved with Bucknell, we have graduated EVERY basketball player. I am more proud of that than our victories over the last two seasons in the NCAA men's tournament. We bring this up to every recruit -- 'Don't be the first one not to graduate' -- and it resonates." Universities: If you take education seriously and set high expectations, competitors respond. If you view education as a technicality and set expectations low, which is the case in most Division I football and basketball programs, don't claim to be shocked by the results.

Finally I wrote, "Because the Raiders had a bye, it will be October before Oakland scores its first touchdown of the 2006 season." **Rachel Lovenheim of Milpitas, Calif.** countered, "What makes you so sure Oakland will score a touchdown in October?"

**Monday, October 2, 2006**  
**Updated: October 3, 2:16 PM ET**  
Marketing HS football's scary

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By Gregg Easterbrook

A while back when I was writing for NFL.com -- I learned so much football hanging around NFL guys that now I practically know what I'm talking about -- I asked a Powerful League Insider what was next in football promotion. Without hesitation he answered, "High school." High school football, he explained, was still pure. The pro version of the sport is excellent, but few can empathize with millionaire players and owners who whine nonstop. The college version of the sport just gets better and better, but cynicism just gets worse and worse about football-factory schools where "student"-athletes major in Fitness Center Towel Service Management. By contrast, high school football is untainted. There's almost no money involved. Boys who aren't super-ultra-gifted can play, and girls now sometimes play. Plus far more people experience football either as players or spectators at the high school level than in college or the pros -- it is estimated that about 225 million tickets were sold to high school football games in 2005, versus 17 million tickets for NFL contests. The marketing of high school football, the Powerful League Insider told me, is the next frontier.

Verily, he spoke sooth. Tonight is the debut of NBC's high school football series, "Friday Night Lights," and the initial reviews are glowing. For sheer cinematography, Nike's Briscoe High football commercial is the most impressive advertisement to run on television in years. MTV has a football reality show about Hoover High in Alabama. Sports-equipment manufacturers have begun to sponsor football programs at high-profile high schools; McDonald's recently sponsored a high school football tournament. Enthusiasm for football is soaring even at academic prep schools -- last Friday my teenagers' academics-oriented high school played its homecoming game before a record crowd of 3,000 people. And ESPN is broadcasting a slate of high school football games this fall.

To a point, this is good. High school football is the most human-scale version of the country's most popular sport, and attention ought to be paid. You can attend a high school game without vast expense and hours of traffic jams and logistics. Your friends and neighbors are there. You can cheer for the roughly 1 million boys and 1,000 girls who play high school football each year. I attend far more high school football games than college or pro games, in part because I'd usually *rather* attend a high school game, whether my kids' team is playing or not. There's something about the dusk sky over a high school football stadium full of kids and their dreams. There's no finer sound than the drums of the marching band echoing off the hill during a high school game. There's a glorious taste of youth and promise to burgers that were grilled by the booster club and have been sitting in the PTA steam tray for hours. And at high school games you don't pay for parking! In terms of offering an accessible sports experience, high school football beats the pros and college handsdown. Plus some of the games are really well played.

Yet shining the promotional spotlight on high school football because it's pure might succeed in ending the purity. Do we really need corporate sponsors muscling into high school sports? Having the local insurance broker or Italian restaurant buy a banner for the stadium is one thing; having multinationals descend is another. Corporate sponsors and ESPN cameras crank up the pressure on kids, adding excitement but subtracting innocence. Their youth and innocence will be gone soon enough. Why speed this up?



Hmm, wonder what the average GPA is for the Briscoe High starting lineup?

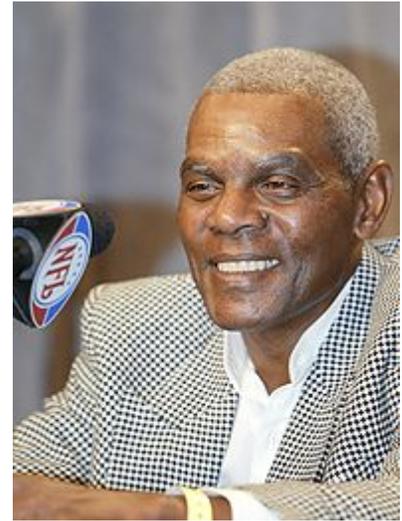
National focus on high school football only makes worse the underside of the subject, namely the hurt feelings of those who don't make the team. Playing high school sports is a wonderful experience, bringing satisfaction and instilling in many kids work habits and team awareness that will serve them well later in life. But except at small rural high schools, only a minority can make the prestigious sports rosters. For every player on a high school football team, there are 10 other students who were cut and still haven't gotten over it, or through no fault of their own never had the size or athletic ability to try out in the first place. Millions of high school kids resent the jocks with their embroidered varsity jackets and the cheerleaders with their impressive squad sweaters. Millions receive a subtle and wholly unfair message of inadequacy as the favored of the sports and cheerleading teams glide by in the halls. The more the promotional spotlight shines on high school football, the worse the leftout are likely to feel.

Then there are the skewed priorities brought on by the quest to win. Many high school players are spending far too much time in the weight room as opposed to the library, and are too tempted to use steroids and HGH to get big. Even high school players gaining weight naturally are asking for future medical problems -- the 285-pound offensive lineman, once rare in the NFL, today is common in high school. Parents are pressured to pay for private trainers and even [high school combines](#). As high school sports become win-at-all-costs, priorities go out the window.

School system priorities become skewed, too. In his new book "Air Ball," John Gerdy, a professor at Ohio University, notes one reason so many high schools have shifted to pre-8 a.m. starting bells is to allow plenty of after-school time, before darkness falls, for the football team to practice. Studies consistently show high school boys and girls don't learn well in early-morning classes; learning for the majority, Gerdy contends, is sacrificed to improve practice conditions for sports teams. Budget priorities are skewed. "Air Ball" says that in New Jersey, high schools spend from 60 to 95 percent of their extracurricular-activity budgets on sports, despite only about a quarter of students being on junior varsity or varsity teams. Skewed school priorities might afflict in other ways. [Here](#), Eli Saslow and Josh Barr of the Washington Post detail the case of a Maryland high school football star who was arrested last spring for armed robbery. His principal wanted to expel him; instead the school system moved him to a new high school and cleared him to play football, which he's doing right now. A local judge agreed to postpone his trial until the week after the high school football seasons ends, and gave him permission to leave the state to visit Ohio State, which is said to be recruiting him. Of course, everyone is innocent until proven guilty, but the boy in this case had a prior conviction for credit card theft. In the Post article, the boy complained on the record about how the arrest spoiled his summer vacation and said of the armed-robbery charge, "If this drags on ... it might mess up getting to [college] and getting started with football." What kind

of message do high school systems send when an armed robbery charge means nothing if you're a football star?

Now let's contemplate the Briscoe High commercial. It's magnificently done, though TMQ wonders whether it was all filmed, or were the faces of the football celebrities -- Matt Leinart, Troy Polamalu, Don Shula, LaDainian Tomlinson, Michael Vick and Brian Urlacher -- digitally inserted? Reader Stephen Peelor of Culver City, Calif., says the backdrops were filmed at Roosevelt High in Los Angeles, an usually large prep school with an enrollment of 5,000. (The fictional Briscoe High's colors are red and white; the real Roosevelt's are red, gold and blue.) The school name is clever and thoughtful. Marlin Briscoe was the first African-American quarterback in the modern NFL, though he ended up spending most of his career at wide receiver, playing for Shula. That's the real Marlin Briscoe standing next to Shula in the pregame speech scene: he's the one with salt-and-pepper hair. The commercial -- [watch it here](#) -- is a tremendously made mini-drama, if implausible in football terms (see below).



At this rate there will soon be an actual high school named after Marlin Briscoe.

But what message does Nike's commercial send? The first thing we see is Jimmy Johnson as a high school teacher with Vick, Tomlinson and Urlacher in his class. None of them are paying attention. Johnson as teacher asks Urlacher as student what happened when Napoleon invaded Russia. Urlacher has no idea, and everyone snickers. It's OK to be stupid as long as you're a football star! The implicit anti-education message sent by the Briscoe High commercial has drawn a flood of mail to the Tuesday Morning Quarterback mailbox, including one from Wesley Brown of San Mateo, California, who wrote, "This commercial presents education as a joke and football as all that matters. Nike should not be putting corporate muscle behind mocking education." Does this commercial tell us Nike as a specific company is indifferent to education, or that corporate America is about to ruin high school football by commercializing it? My fear is the latter. The Briscoe High commercial concludes, FOOTBALL IS EVERYTHING. It most assuredly is not! Football is at very best a minor aspect of high school, even for the players. Please, corporate marketers, don't labor to confuse high school educational priorities even more.

In other football news, a mere month of the NFL season has been played, yet already there are no remaining possible pairings of undefeated teams. Baltimore, Chicago and Indianapolis are undefeated, but not scheduled against each other. An undefeated Bears club could meet an undefeated Colts or Ravens squad in the Super Bowl, but since no team has ever gone 16-0 in the regular season, it seems unlikely two will perform that feat in the same season. Hope you enjoyed the Seahawks at Bears game Sunday night -- it was the last game of the 2006 season to match undefeated teams.

**Stat of the Week No. 1:** Baltimore and Chicago have outscored their opponents 202-62.

**Stat of the Week No. 2:** Oakland and Tennessee have been outscored 74-200.

**Stat of the Week No. 3:** From the fourth quarter of Week 3 to the fourth quarter of Week 4, NFC defending champion Seattle was outscored 6-61.

**Stat of the Week No. 4:** Buffalo has allowed six of six fourth-down conversion attempts by opponents.

**Stat of the Week No. 5:** Jacksonville had a scoring drive of minus-1 yard.

**Stat of the Week No. 6:** The Indianapolis Colts play their first six games in just two stadiums, the RCA Dome and at the Meadowlands. Reader stat submitted by Ben Christen of Ashtabula, Ohio.

**Stat of the Week No. 7:** During a stretch of touchdown drives connected by a successful onside kick, the Jets held the ball for 21 consecutive downs.

**Stat of the Week No. 8:** In two road games, San Francisco has given up 75 points.

**Stat of the Week No. 9:** In four games, Chicago has given up 29 points.

**Stat of the Week No. 10:** The Jets staged an 18-play, 79-yard drive that spanned 8 minutes, 11 seconds, but resulted in no points.

**Cheerleader of the Week:** Alan Kaufmann of McLean, Va., nominates [Cameron of the Charger Girls](#), whose favorite quotation is from Leon Trotsky. You don't bump into Trotsky-quoting cheer-babes every day. The citation is, "In spite of everything, life is beautiful." If only Trotsky had lived to see Cameron's swimsuit calendar photo! According to her team bio, Cameron's hobbies are running and "trophy trucks." What is a trophy truck? Does that mean that after you've made it big, you ditch the first truck that was with you during the hard times and get a flashy, younger truck with a great chassis?



We apologize for last week's cheesecake-free TMQ by presenting Cameron, the Trotsky-quoting cheerleader from the Chargers.

### **Favre Does Not Rage Against the Dying of His**

**Light:** "Imagine how Brett Favre would have reacted if coaches sent in the punter on fourth-and-5 from the opponent's 35! If Green Bay coaches did [that] to Favre, there would be a detonation so powerful it would light up screens at the [National Earthquake Information Center](#)." [So I wrote two years ago](#) in scoring a different veteran quarterback who trotted meekly off the field rather than insist on going for it as, I assumed, Brett Favre always would. Yet exactly that happened last night on "Monday Night Football." Trailing 10-9 in the third quarter, Green Bay faced fourth-and-4 on the Philadelphia 35 -- precisely the situation in which I said Favre would never leave the field. Mike McCarthy sent in the place-kicker, and Favre meekly trotted off. Forget the bad tactics by the Packers' coach. When sent in last night, Dave Rayner, the Green Bay place-kicker, was 1-for-3 in his career from beyond 50 yards, and a miss would hand Philadelphia possession at the 44. I scarcely need mention that after Rayner missed, it took the Eagles just two snaps to streak the length of the field for a 17-9 lead. I scarcely need mention that as Favre trotted off the field, TMQ wrote the words "game over" in his notebook -- from the fourth-and-4 on the Philadelphia 35 on, Green Bay collapsed, the Eagles winning 31-9. What was really striking about this play was how meekly Favre trotted off. Favre in his prime -- a close game on Monday night, fourth-and-4 on the opponents' 35, no way on Earth does Favre meekly yield to the kicking team. Last night he did just that.

Cheer-babes professionalism note: Several times in this young season, cheerleaders of various clubs have been scantily attired, yet their teams didn't win, calling into question the normal constant that equates cheerleader undress with victory. But on a hot sunny afternoon in September, any amateur can disrobe. It is when the weather begins to turn cool that cheerleader professionalism comes into

play and appeases the football gods. Monday night in Philadelphia, the kickoff temperature was 59 degrees and falling, yet the Eagles' cheer-babes came out in their summer outfits, which are barely more than bikinis. Outstanding professionalism, and needless to say, the home team was rewarded with victory.

**Sweet Play of the Week No. 1:** Trailing Jersey/B 21-17, Indianapolis faced a third-and-goal on the Jets' 2. The Colts lined up with double tight ends; backup tight end Bryan Fletcher ran an "in" to the center of the end zone. Jersey/B defenders doubled up on Marvin Harrison and Dallas Clark, ignoring Fletcher, who had two receptions coming into the game. Peyton Manning sprinted in reverse all the way to the 15 before heave-hoeing off his back foot to Fletcher for the touchdown. Reaching the goal line and then throwing to the guy who never gets the ball is always sweet. Cautionary note: Both Manning brothers love to heave-hoe off the back foot while fading backward, but often this action means trouble. Counting only meaningful games -- that is, disregarding late-season contests when they had already locked up their best playoff seeding -- the Colts have won an incredible 25 consecutive regular-season games. The Colts also have lost seven of their past 10 postseason games.

**Sweet Play of the Week No. 2:** Seattle led 3-0 and Chicago faced a third-and-8 on the Blue Men Group's 9. Seattle came out in a nickel -- the Seahawks' defense spent much of the game in nickel or dime looks, and the dime has not been played much against the Chicago Bears in recent memory. The Bears lined up trips left. The inside man went right, the middle man ran a buttonhook and Muhsin Muhammad ran a Z-in (zed-in to Canadians) and was uncovered for the touchdown. The Chicago offensive line played well throughout this contest, granting Rex Grossman ample time to scan the field. All quarterbacks suddenly become more talented when they have time.

**Sour Play of the Week No. 1:** Carolina led 21-10 with two minutes remaining, the United States Saints were backed up on their own 14, yet the Cats' defenders nevertheless let Marques Colston get behind them for an 86-yard touchdown reception that allowed New Orleans to pull within 21-18. The game is almost over, where oh where might the pass go? *Maybe up the field!*

**Sour Play of the Week No. 2:** DeAngelo Hall got his third interception of the young season for Atlanta -- and for the second time, he held the ball high and waved it around as he ran. The football gods cannot let this go unpunished. Atlanta rushing update: Three different Falcons rushers outgained Cardinals star tailback Edgerrin James. Atlanta leads the league in rushing, averaging a phenomenal 234 yards per game. Can this be sustained? New Orleans shut down the Falcons' running game by putting eight men on the line and daring Michael-Mike Vick to throw. An eight-man front also nullifies the modified sprint-option Atlanta has been using, because in that scheme the defensive end does not need to decide between the fullback and the quarterback, the defensive end always takes the fullback. Inexplicably, Arizona mostly played a passing defense against the accuracy-challenged Vick, allowing the Falcons to run the ball. Expect Atlanta to see more eight-man fronts as the season progresses.

**Sour Play of the Week No. 3:** Leading Baltimore 10-7, San Diego faced a third-and-1 at midfield late in the first half. The Bolts came out in a power set with LaDainian Tomlinson as a deep-set back. At the snap, Philip Rivers fired the ball overhand, as if he was passing, to Tomlinson behind him. This pass-like lateral traveled so far backward that Tomlinson took the ball seven yards deep in the backfield, and ended up losing three; San Diego punted. When you need one yard for a first down, why are you firing the ball seven yards backward?

**Sweet 'N' Sour Play:** With Chicago leading 13-3 late in the first half, Ricky Manning made a sweet tipped-to-myself interception that set up a touchdown and turned the contest into a walkover. But it

was sour that Matt Hasselbeck heaved a crazy pass into triple coverage. Seattle was only trailing by 10 points, and is a high-scoring team. The down was third-and-15, and often quarterbacks force the ball into coverage on long-yardage downs. Hasselbeck should simply have thrown the ball out of bounds. Note: From the last stanza of the Seattle-Jersey/A game to halftime at Chicago, Hasselbeck threw four interceptions in three quarters. And what was Hasselbeck doing still on the field once Chicago led 34-6?

**In Tonight's News, Nationalists Overrun China. But First, This Breaking Terrell Owens Story:** Last week Terrell Owens made the front pages of many newspapers and this Web site, among many others -- for an incident in which *nothing happened*. Below are upcoming T.O. headline stories.

OWENS DENIES ALIEN ABDUCTION

GOVERNOR OF TEXAS LEADS OWENS VIGIL

OWENS BRIEFED ON NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE ESTIMATE

OWENS FIRES GARDENER, CALLS LAWN "KIND OF SPLOTCHY"

OWENS WON'T MEET WITH HAMAS UNLESS IT RECOGNIZES ISRAEL

PUBLICIST: "NO COMMENT" ON RUMOR T.O. DISCOVERS CANCER CURE

OWENS DOWNLOADS CASHMERE DANCE TRACK

REPORT: OWENS HAS TURKEY SUB, APPLE, BIG COOKIE FOR LUNCH

WHITE HOUSE MUM ON OWENS LUNCH REPORT

OWENS DRIVES TO COWBOYS' TRAINING FACILITY, PARKS, GOES IN

OWENS SAYS "NO TRUTH" TO VISION OF VIRGIN MARY

**Wacky Food of the Week:** The Corner Bakery restaurant chain now offers "hand-roasted" coffee.

**Buck-Buck-Brawckkkkkkk No. 1:** Leading New England 6-0 at home early in the second quarter, Cincinnati faced fourth-and-1 on its 38 and punted. Yes, most coaches would say, "But that's what we always do." As last week's column explained in detail, going for it in this sort of situation is very attractive. Cincinnati went on to lose, and you got the feeling that had Marvin Lewis gone for it here, the outcome might have been different.



Space aliens interviewed by Page 2 denied involvement in the Terrell Owens matter.

**Buck-Buck-Brawckkkkkkk No. 2:** Trailing 10-0, San Francisco punted on fourth-and-4 at the Kansas City 42. Trailing 24-0, San Francisco attempted a field goal on fourth-and-4 from at the Kansas City 33 with 11 seconds remaining in the first half. Sure, a touchdown is unlikely at that point. But what does a 24-3 halftime deficit accomplish, except assuring the coach that he won't have a shutout on his record? Outraged, the football gods pushed the try aside, and it was 24-0 at the intermission. Trailing 27-0 in the second half, San Francisco punted on fourth-and-3. Trailing 34-0, San Francisco punted on fourth-and-1. Still trailing 34-0 with just 5:55 remaining, San Francisco punted on another fourth-and-1 and the football gods, outraged again, allowed Dante Hall to return the punt for a touchdown. Nolan the Younger: you're down by 34 points, why are you punting on fourth-and-1???????????? And a question for Herm Edwards, why were the Chiefs' starters still on the field with Kansas City ahead 34-0 in the fourth quarter?



The Kansas City Chiefs' cheerleaders appease the gods of field goal kicking.

**The Homework Conspiracy:** Valerie Strauss of the Washington Post reported that new studies by Duke University's Program on Education conclude, "Elementary school students receive no benefit from homework." The new book "The Homework Myth" by Alfie Kohn comes to the same conclusion, adding that in middle school more than 90 minutes of homework per night, and in high school more than two hours per night, backfire by reducing grades and test scores. The reasons are plain as the nose on your face -- too much homework leaves kids tired in the morning and makes them sick of education, while denying the time they need to goof off and be kids. Yet despite research showing large amounts of homework actively injurious to education, homework requirements have been rising steadily in public schools. Tuesday Morning Quarterback thinks he knows why: Teachers are using homework to exact vengeance on parents.

Since the National Commission on Education [declared](#), in 1983, that "educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a Nation and a people," parents have been complaining nonstop about schools. Set aside that the declaration of the National Commission on Education contains a grammatical error -- "nation" is not a proper noun and in this usage should not be capitalized. The 1983 report put school performance into the headlines. The media now stereotype public schoolteachers as muttonheads who oppose high standards and are more concerned with union politics and political correctness than teaching the basics and classics. (In my experience, teachers spend most of their time on basic subjects and classic texts.)



Remember, helicopter parents, you were the ones who complained about standards.

The annoyingly large subset of "helicopter parents" now constantly second-guesses teachers. Meanwhile salaries of doctors, lawyers and other professionals keep accelerating toward the asteroid belt, while teachers are expected to work for love rather than money. The teachers' revenge? Assign loads of homework. Assigning loads of work is a great CYA tactic against

complaints about standards. More important, teachers know too much homework renders home life unhappy during the evening when exhausted moms and dads are trying to relax. In those glistening suburban houses with the flat-panel TVs and granite countertops, kids are crying about homework and parents are stressed about homework -- take that, helicopter parents! Plus, teachers know that many moms and dads not only help kids with their homework, but end up doing the homework. Assigning extra homework makes affluent parents miserable, exacting the public teachers' vengeance.

**Field Goals Matter: Case Study No. 1:** Game tied at 14, Jersey/B faced fourth-and-goal on the Indianapolis 2 at the 4:40 mark of the third. The Jets had staged a monster drive, and a touchdown here might have swung the game. But Kick Early, Go For It Late! It's not yet the fourth quarter, and field goals are nothing to sneeze at. (Outside field goal range, TMQ often favors going for it; inside field goal range, taking three.) Eric "I Was a Teenaged Coach" Mangini gambles for six, and the interception call might have been questionable, but all that call did was move the ball out to the 20 - - the Jets still would have gotten no points. Indianapolis took possession and drove to fourth-and-goal on the 2. The Colts kicked for three and went on to win the game. The two teams faced identical choices on back-to-back possessions -- and the team that followed TMQ's immutable law was the one that prevailed.

Pride note: When the Giants play in the big round facility in New Jersey, it is officially Giants Stadium. When the Jets play, it is Meadowlands Stadium. That's indignity enough for the junior Jersey franchise. But Sunday, as the Jets performed there, NFL.com's play-by-play insisted on calling the facility Giants Stadium.

**Field Goals Matter: Case Study No. 2:** San Diego lost 16-13 on a Baltimore touchdown with 34 seconds remaining. Earlier the Bolts honked two field goal attempts, one that was a failed kick and one when the holder bobbled the snap. Think field goals are wimpy plays? Had San Diego connected on the two kicks, it would have walked off the field whistlin'.

**Triumph of Line Play No. 1:** Spectators and announcers usually follow the ball, but Tuesday Morning Quarterback followed the line play in the tense fourth quarter of the Baltimore-San Diego contest. Ravens taking over on their 40 with 3 minutes remaining, trailing 13-9, Baltimore blockers provided perfect protection for Steve McNair as he moved the team downfield for the go-ahead score with 34 seconds left. On what would prove the winning pass, McNair stood back unhurried while scanning the field, no Bolt pass rusher near him. Then when San Diego had the ball for a Hail Mary on the final snap, Baltimore's line recorded the first sack against the Chargers in 2006. Nicely done, big purple people.

**Triumph of Line Play No. 2:** The New England-Cincinnati game was a lot closer than the final score suggested, the Patriots leading 21-13 at the start of the fourth quarter and the Bengals then falling apart with consecutive lost fumbles in their own territory. The sports-yak world talked about Laurence Maroney's 125-yard day, but what impressed TMQ was the blocking. Check Maroney's 25-yard touchdown run: perfect blocks by Stephen Neal, Logan Mankins and yet another New England who-dat who instantly performs well, Wesley Britt. It's pretty fun to run 25 yards for a touchdown when everyone in front of you already has been knocked to the ground. Running up the score note: Two weeks ago I asked why the Bengals, leading Cleveland 34-10 in the fourth quarter, still had Carson Palmer on the field and still throwing passes. Reader John Bosha of Camp Hill, Pa. suggests Sunday's defeat was plainly "the vengeance of the football gods."



This photo must have been snapped before Carson Palmer fumbled away the game for Cincy.

**Best Block:** The best single block of the day came from Buffalo's Jason Peters, a third-year undrafted gent from Arkansas, who is becoming one of the league's elite offensive linemen. A common fault of offensive linemen is making the first or primary block, then standing around watching the play rather than finding someone else to block. On what would become Peerless Price's 8-yard touchdown reception off a bubble screen, Price was all the way back at the 15 and seemingly doomed to take a big loss when Peters, rather than standing around watching, drilled a Minnesota defender with a perfect secondary block.

**When Toyota Becomes the Official Car of the Detroit Lions, Feel Free to Panic:** How bad are things for General Motors? Toyota is now the ["Official/Exclusive Car and Truck of the Buffalo Bills."](#) The Buffalo area was once a G.M. manufacturing hub.

**Cylon Pin-Up Calendars Feature Babe Robots Removing Their Fenders:** Last week Tuesday Morning Quarterback asked, where are the body organs that generate the superpowers of superheroes? Sure, I'll believe the woman in the green body suit can blast neutron waves from her eyes. Just show me the body organ that produces the neutrons. With "Battlestar Galactica" returning to the Sci-Fi Channel this Friday, it's time to ask the same question about the sinister Cylons.

First, an update on evil aliens in science fiction. Increasingly, they look exactly like people -- perhaps for budget reasons. The Cylons of the original 1970s "Battlestar Galactica" were pleasing ridiculous clanking robots: You thought, *these buckets of bolts took over the galaxy?* In the "reimagined" "Galactica" currently airing, the Cylons have evolved from metallic to take the form of the humans who made the original mistake of creating them. This facilitates filming, as no complex prosthetic makeup or suits are required. For several seasons, the wisecracking commandos on "Stargate SG-1" fought evil aliens called Replicators who, conveniently, made themselves look exactly like people. For several seasons on "Star Trek Deep Space Nine," the Federation fought evil aliens called the Dominion who, conveniently, made themselves look exactly like people. On the "Star Trek Voyager" series, Species was introduced as the most dangerous super-advanced aliens in the cosmos. In their true form, Species 8472 looked like giant praying mantes. Then these aliens started popping up as regular foes, and conveniently, decided to take human form. "Hey Ralph, you can put away the giant praying mantis suits."

Back to the Cylons. Because they have evolved from living machines to human form, supposedly it is impossible to tell them from real people. Supposedly not even a medical examination can distinguish a Cylon from a *Homo sapiens*, and several episode plots have turned on trying to determine who is trustworthy and who is a Cylon infiltrator. But if the Cylons are physically identical to people, how can Cylons have advanced powers? Cylons are depicted as super-strong -- that means their musculature would have to be different. In one episode, a Cylon agent inserts a computer cable into a dataport in her arm; why doesn't the dataport show up in medical examinations? Cylons are described as impossible to kill because if their bodies die, they transmit their souls to the nearest Cylon starcruiser, to be transplanted into newly manufactured bodies. One presumes some body organ or device would be required to transmit a soul across interstellar distance, yet Cylons are said to be physiologically identical to people. Upside of current "Battlestar Galactica" premise: if only all machines looked like actress [Tricia Helfer](#), who plays the chief cyborg.



We'd be happy to be enslaved by thousands of cybernetic copies of actress Tricia Helfer.

**Trust Us, We're Experts:** Sports Illustrated predicted Carolina and Miami would meet in the Super Bowl. The teams are a combined 3-5.

**Classical Composer Stud!** Last week choral composer Eric Whitacre's album "Cloudburst" sold out on Amazon the day after NPR did a feature on his music. In an all-time Tuesday Morning Quarterback first, I have included this item solely to create an excuse for the ESPN.com Art Department to run, for female and nontraditional male readers, a photograph of Whitacre, [who is an ultra-hunk](#).



Eric Whitacre, in case you're interested ...

**Preposterous Punt Watch:** Trailing 7-3 in the second quarter, Minnesota punted on fourth-and-2 from the Buffalo 49. Trailing 17-6 in the fourth quarter, Minnesota punted on fourth-and-2 from the Buffalo 49. The Vikings lost by five points.

**What The? Huh? What?** Miami scoring with 1:43 remaining to pull within 17-15 of Houston, the Marine Mammals lined up for the deuce attempt. Tailback Ronnie Brown took the pitch right, then executed a dancer's "turn out," spinning over his outside shoulder, and ran back left. From there he threw the halfback pass, incomplete, and the Moo Cows went on to win. Every week there is one play TMQ watches over and over again in rapt fascination, and this week, this was it. Everything about the play was wrong. First, the right-handed Brown was running left, and threw left-handed. Second, the play was designed to go to tight end Randy McMichael, who lined up as a slot man right and then crossed left behind the formation in front of Brown. Running your pattern behind your own offensive line might work in the middle of the field, but at the goal line, where everything is crowded, McMichael immediately crashed into a defender and was taken out of the play. Third, two Dolphins receivers in the end zone were right next to each other, one of them obviously having run the wrong route. Fourth, Chris Chambers fell down in the end zone as the pass approached, knocked over by his own man. Plays don't get much shaggier than this.

**Miami Dolphins Sack-O-Meter:** Daunte Culpepper has been sacked 21 times. Tackles L.J. Shelton and Vernon Carey, both former first-round picks, have been awful. Desmond Bieler of the Washington Post further notes that in the 11 games the quarterback has played in for the Vikings and Dolphins since losing Randy Moss as his battery mate, Culpepper has thrown eight touchdown passes and 15 interceptions.

*Aaaaaiiiiiiiyyyyyeeee!* Indianapolis scoring to take a 31-28 lead over the Jets with 50 seconds remaining, the Colts kicked off. Jersey/B rookie return man Leon Washington fielded the kick on his goal line. He could have stepped back into the end zone for a touchback; instead, confused, Washington ran out and got tackled at the 2, pinning the Jets against their own goal line. Ye gods. Reader Luis Argerich of Buenos Aires, Argentina notes that here is the official Game Book description of Jersey/B's final down, an attempt to run the Stanford Band play. Eight Jets gentlemen carried the ball:

(:08) (Shotgun) 10-C.Pennington pass short middle to 29-L.Washington to NYJ 40 for 8 yards [93-D.Freeney]. Lateral to 16-B.Smith to NYJ 37 for minus-3 yards. Lateral to 87-L.Coles to IND 44 for 19 yards. Lateral to 10-C.Pennington to IND 37 for 7 yards. Lateral to 81-J.McCareins to IND 35 for 2 yards. FUMBLES, recovered by NYJ-16-B.Smith at IND 33. 16-B.Smith to IND 37 for minus -4 yards. FUMBLES, recovered by NYJ-87-L.Coles at IND 40. 87-L.Coles to IND 27 for 13 yards. Lateral to 74-N.Mangold to IND 27 for no gain. FUMBLES, RECOVERED by IND-42-J.David at IND 34. 42-J.David to IND 39 for 5 yards (29-L.Washington).

**We're All Professionals Here:** Minnesota launched a 9-yard punt. Buffalo lost yardage on its possession, then replied with a 22-yard punt.

***Poyekhali ad Astra!*** : Anousheh Ansari, history's first female space tourist, last week landed safely in Kazakhstan after a stay aboard the International Space Station. Surprisingly little attention was paid to her flight, considering Ansari, an American, is not only the first woman to pay for space tourism but is an Iranian-born self-made millionaire. Also, Ansari became the first person ever to [blog from space](#). Ansari flew to orbit from Baikonur Cosmodrome, which during the Moon race days was the secret stronghold of Soviet space activity. TMQ likes that at the moment the engines on her rocket ignited, Ansari hollered *poyekhali!* -- "let's go!" or even "charge!" in Russian. *Poyekhali!* is what Yuri Gagarin hollered in 1961 at the moment the engines ignited on the flight that made him the first member of genus *Homo* to reach space. Nice sense of history there.



Ansari arrived at the International Space Station only to discover that it lacks Wi-Fi.

**Too Bad Steve Largent Isn't in Congress Anymore, Shuler Would Have Someone to Throw To:** Former third-overall draft pick Health Shuler is running for Congress in North Carolina. Strangely, [his campaign bio](#) does not mention his NFL career statistic of 15 touchdown passes and 33 interceptions. Of the issues in Shuler's platform, one is [Second Amendment rights](#): "As a lifelong hunter and sportsman ... I will always support the rights of law-abiding citizens to own firearms, to hunt and to protect their life and property." Let's hope Shuler aims his guns more carefully than he aimed his passes!

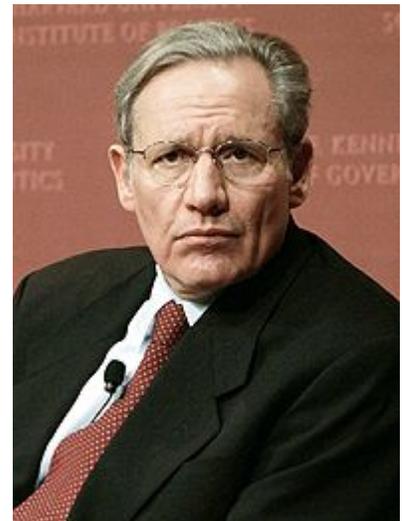
**On the Plus Side, Now Alexander Has Plenty of Time to Play Video Games:** Shaun Alexander was on the cover of the latest Madden game, and now stands on the sidelines modeling NFL apparel. Coincidence? A reader haikuizes,

The power of prayer  
can't overcome the curse of  
Madden oh-seven.

-- *Fred Chalmers, North Reading, Mass.*

**At 4:38 Eastern on Oct. 1, Oakland Scored Its First Touchdown of the 2006 Season:** Oakland compiled 59 yards of offense in the second half at home, while losing a 21-3 lead to Cleveland. If you can't hold a 21-3 lead at home against a winless team you are, officially, pathetic. Randy Moss racked up one reception for 5 yards. Results of the Raiders' second half possessions: punt, punt, downs, punt.

**"Here's the Book, Young Lady. By the Way, You Look Nice In That Trenchcoat and False Mustache.":** Last week the New York Times embarrassed the Washington Post by being first to obtain a copy of Bob Woodward's book "State of Denial." The Times obtained the book by the incredibly scientifically advanced means of buying it in a store -- "at full retail price," the paper primly added. The super-sleuth purchase was carried out, surely under cover of darkness, by Julie Bosman, a Times reporter who was once a New Republic intern and who contributed some research to my book "The Progress Paradox." No doubt future journalism students will study Bosman's stealthy technique! But, hey, New York Times -- how come Julie didn't get to write the story? The book she obtained was handed over to a senior male reporter for analysis. Next time put Julie's work on the front page, OK, Multicolored Lady?



How did the New York Times get his book first? We can only tell you on a deep background basis.

**By the Hammer of Grabthar, He Was Avenged!** Atlanta leading Arizona 6-3, Mora the Younger sent much-ridiculed understudy place-kicker Mike Koenen out to attempt a 51-yard field goal. To that point, Koenen was 3-of-10 in field goal attempts on his career. Surely the Cactus Wrens were expecting a fake! Straight and true, three points.

**Picks of the Week No. 1:** Trailing Detroit 34-33, St. Louis faced third-and-4 on the Lions' 5 at the two-minute warning. Les Mouflons lined up with Tory Holt slot right and Isaac Bruce wide right. Bruce came in motion back inside Holt. At the snap, Holt pretty much shoved the Detroit defender out of the way -- in basketball he would have been whistled for moving screen -- as Bruce ran an under-out for the touchdown. Zebras, where were you on this play?

**Picks of the Week No. 2:** Trailing New Orleans 10-7, Carolina lined up for second-and-goal from the Saints' 4. Keyshawn Johnson and Drew Carter were wide left. At the snap, Johnson pretty much shoved the New Orleans defender out of the way -- in basketball he would have been whistled for moving screen -- as Carter ran an out for the touchdown. Zebras, where were you on this play?  
Note: New Orleans scored to take the 10-7 lead on a third-and-goal on which the Saints ran up to the line and quick-snapped while Cats defenders were not set, several not even facing the line of scrimmage.

**This Fulfills My Obligation to Say Something About the Dallas-Tennessee Game:** OK, it's traditional for a rookie quarterback's first start to be cover-your-eyes awful. But it is not traditional for the Tennessee Titans to be blown off the field, and they were by the Cowboys, 45-14. For many seasons the Flaming Thumbtacks have been a classy, power team. Now Tennessee has lost 13 of its past 15, with three of the past five blowout defeats. Does Jeff Fisher still coach in Nashville?

**Leftover Briscoe High Points:** In one scene of the commercial, the crowd cheers wildly for a late hit out of bounds. We're supposed to cheer for unsportsmanlike conduct? As many readers, including Asif Khalid of Los Angeles, pointed out, Briscoe wins with seconds remaining on a long pass thrown by a halfback. "No defense, not even in high school, would bite on the run-fake from midfield on the game's final play," Khalid wrote. The winning pass is caught by "Ryon Williams" -- [go here and click "team"](#) -- whom I'm guessing is a young actor. He's the only unknown in the commercial, which in addition to Marlin Briscoe and NFL players has cameos by Jill Arrington, Jillian Barberie, Lee Corso, Urban Meyer, Deion Sanders and Steve Young. Barberie plays the high school co-ed who checks out Williams in the hallway. The scene is vaguely odd because the baby-faced Williams is supposed to be 17, and Barberie was born in 1966. Yes, it's nice that a woman can still be a bombshell at age 40 and, yes, acting is different from playing yourself. But would any big corporation air a commercial in which a 40-year-old man ogles the behind of a 17-year-old female athlete? Finally the music track playing is "Spirit in the Sky," which is a song about dying! "Prepare yourself, you know it's a must/Gotta have a friend in Jesus/So you know that when you die/He's gonna recommend you to the spirit in the sky."

**DEAR [INSERT NAME], YOU ARE THE ONLY ONE I CAN TRUST:** Before Do-Not-Call lists deflated telemarketing, what vexed TMQ was the realization that companies would not be cold-calling at all hours offering phony real estate deals or fake vacations won in counterfeit contests unless *people were falling for those hustles*. That lots of somebodies were falling for telemarketing hustles was a sobering thought. Then came the Nigerian e-mail scam, those messages saying someone has found a large forgotten deposit in an African bank and will share the money with you in return for "fees." This is so transparently, obviously a con I thought there would not be one single human being on the face of the Earth who would fall for it. Most Nigerian scam e-mails are addressed to "Dear Sir" or "Dear Owner" because the con artists are sending bulk to spam lists and don't even know the names of the people they are addressing. Presumably if you had your clutches on a multimillion-dollar forgotten deposit and needed a partner, you would want perhaps to know the name of your partner.

Lately the "trunk of gold" version of the e-mail has been circulating. Supposedly a trunk of gold stolen during an African coup d'état is being held by a security firm on the African west coast. The e-mailer offers to share with you the location of the trunk -- despite not knowing your name! Another current Internet hustle is an e-mail saying you've won a million pounds in the Irish Lottery and asking you to send the lotto office personal financial information for processing of your pot. **LOTTERIES DO NOT OPERATE THIS WAY!** In a third current Internet hustle, the mark is asked to deposit checks for "an international charity" into his or her personal bank account, keep a 10 percent commission, then wire the rest to an account in Nigeria or Ukraine. **INTERNATIONAL CHARITIES DO NOT OPERATE THIS WAY!** A fake check for, say, \$10,000 arrives at the mark's house; the mark deposits the check and wires \$9,000 from his or her own account to Nigeria, expecting a \$1,000 profit for doing next to nothing. The check bounces and the mark is out \$9,000.

Nigerian e-mail scams and various imitators should be proliferating only if people with money fall for them. How could anyone stupid enough to fall for such obvious con jobs also have money to lose? For a cautionary tale, [read this New Yorker piece](#) about a seemingly intelligent man who fell

hook, line and sinker, wiring about \$80,000 of his money to African banks, and also tried to launder stolen checks sent to him from Nigeria, ending up in prison for bank fraud. The story is especially chilling because it's a "long con:" the Nigerian thieves sent the mark hundreds of e-mails over months. Short cons are one thing. I slam on the brakes in front of your car and there's a fender bender; I offer not to report it to your insurance agency if you give me \$300; you never realize my car's bumper was already damaged before this started. The short con is over in a few minutes, the hustler vanishing the moment money changes hands. Long cons are especially weird because they involve psychological relationships between the con artist and mark. According to the New Yorker story, the victim in this case became psychologically dependent on receiving e-mails from Nigeria telling him riches were coming, and would plead for more e-mails even as he wired away what money he did possess.

**Stop Me Before I Blitz Again! No. 1** Leading 27-17 in the fourth quarter, Washington safety-blitzed Jacksonville; touchdown Jaguars. OK, sometimes it doesn't work. Now Washington leads 30-27 with 39 seconds remaining, Jax facing fourth-and-8 at midfield. Surely the Skins won't blitz again. My 11-year-old, Spenser, a Jacksonville fan, was watching with me; when the ball was snapped and the Redskins safety blitzed, I turned to him and said, "Don't worry, first down." So it was.

Note about Washington's eventual overtime win: It's good for quarterbacks to have short memories. On Mark Brunell's first pass of the game, he threw a horrible duck directly into the hands of Rashean Mathis of Jacksonville. Brunell recovered to toss three touchdown passes, including the winner. Meanwhile there are few plays more exciting in then NFL format than a length-of-the-field overtime touchdown at home. When Brunell threw to Santana Moss on the overtime's third snap, Jax safety Deon Grant committed the safety's cardinal sin, letting someone get behind him. The result was a wonderful 68-yard touchdown sprint in front of delirious home fans. Moss even got to run the final 30 yards past a line of glamorous, nearly naked Redskins cheerleaders. Football heaven!

**Stop Me Before I Blitz Again! No. 2:** In the first 56 minutes of the Buffalo-Minnesota game, the Bills' defense held the Vikings to two field goals, eight first downs and 226 yards of offense. In the final four minutes, the Bills allowed a touchdown, six first downs and 104 yards of offense, Buffalo barely winning when a Minnesota player dropped what would have been a touchdown pass in the closing seconds. What changed between the first 56 minutes and the last four minutes? The Bills began blitzing like crazy.

**Obscure College Score of the Week No. 1:** Morningside 37, Nebraska Wesleyan 0. Located in Sioux City, Iowa, Morningside [issues a notebook computer](#) to each incoming student. So mom and dad, the year is \$24,950 but the laptop is free! Tuesday Morning Quarterback often observes that every college and university in the United States claims to have finished high in the influential U.S. News rankings, and everybody can't be highly rated. Morningside takes this marketing strategy to new heights by prominently placing the U.S. News "America's Best Colleges" logo on its home page. But if you click the logo it simply takes you to the Morningside admissions department, no further mention of U.S. News made.



Your overtime touchdown is very nice and all that, but Santana, you seem to be blocking our view of the cheerleaders.

**Obscure College Score of the Week No. 2:** Pittsburg of Kansas 59, Emporia State 57 (four overtimes). There were eight touchdowns in overtime as Pittsburg of Kansas -- "Home of the Nation's Only Gorillas," referring to the sports team not the fraternities -- beat Emporia. Since TMQ often takes shots at Pittsburg of Kansas running up the score, let me compliment the school for making it easy to find the [athletic program's graduation rates](#). Most colleges elaborately bury this information. Pittsburg of Kansas prominently displays its rate because the school's athletes have a better graduation share (71 percent) than non-athletes in the student body (47 percent).

**Actual Good News from the NCAA:** The latest graduation statistics reported by the NCAA are a breath of fresh air -- Division I football graduated 65 percent of scholarship players overall, and men's Division I basketball graduated 59 percent. There's still quite a way to go, but these numbers make the trend positive. The new figures give credit for athletes who transfer out, then graduate somewhere else; previously, such a student was classified as not having graduated. For scholarship athletes, the NCAA reported, the highest graduate was 89 percent for skiers. Some 70 percent of those with bowling scholarships graduated, the NCAA said. *Bowling scholarships?* The University of Nebraska, often-cited as a school where football players don't attend class, made a huge positive step, graduating 88 percent of football athletes. Perennial big-sports graduation leader Bucknell was at the top again, graduating 100 percent of its Division I men's basketball players and 95 percent of its Division I-AA football players. The University of Maryland, which embarrassed collegiate sports a few years ago by winning the men's basketball title with a team from which no one graduated, once again brought up the rear with only 18 percent graduation for its men's basketball scholarship-holders. "I feel very positive about what I have done here academically": Maryland men's basketball coach Gary Williams after the NCAA reported his program's graduation rate is a dismal 18 percent. Hmm, maybe the core problem at the University of Maryland is that the *coaches* need to start attending classes. [You can check the graduation rate of any Division I college here](#).

**Reader Animadversion:** Got a complaint or a deeply held grievance? Write me at [TMQ\\_ESPN@yahoo.com](mailto:TMQ_ESPN@yahoo.com). Include your real name and the name of your hometown, and I may quote you by name unless you instruct me otherwise. Note: Giving your hometown improves your odds of being quoted.

**Next Week:** Julie Bosman obtains the Steelers' game plan by walking into the Pittsburgh locker room and offering to pay full retail price.



We figured you deserved a reward for making it all the way to the end of the column. So here, another shot of the Chiefs' cheer-babes doing those leg-kicks!

**Monday, October 9, 2006**  
**Updated: October 10, 2:45 PM ET**  
The rise and fall of Brett Favre

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By Gregg Easterbrook

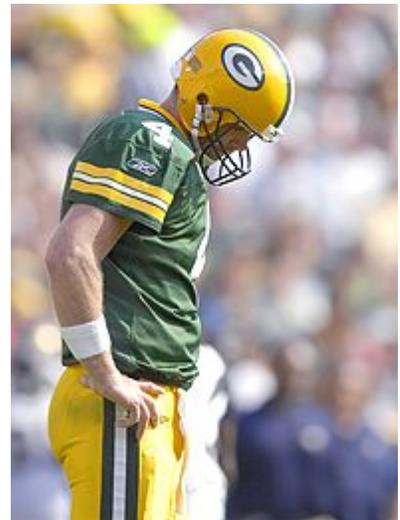
There are 44 seconds remaining at Lambeau Field. The Packers, trailing 23-20, are on the St. Louis 11-yard line, close to a dramatic last-second win. The crowd roars at military afterburner decibels. Brett Favre takes the snap, he drops back, and -- fumbles, St. Louis ball, game over.

At the risk of quoting myself -- Oscar Wilde said, "I often quote myself, it adds spice to the conversation" -- let me reiterate what I wrote about Favre a year ago: "We'd like to think stellar athletes go out in glory, and occasionally this happens. Yet in many cases legendary athletes depart on a bum note. In Dan Marino's final game, the Dolphins lost 62-7. In Larry Bird's final game, the Celtics were knocked out of the playoffs as Bird played poorly. On Jim Kelly's final snap, he fumbled in opposing territory late in the Bills' only playoff defeat in Ralph Wilson Stadium history. In Jerry Rice's final game, he had no receptions as his team lost in the playoffs. In Michael Jordan's final game, his team lost by 20 points.

"For more than a decade, Favre has been a joy to watch and a darling of the football gods. But now his powers are declining, and when great athletes begin to lose abilities they once had, many find this hard to face. 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. In Kelly's final season, he threw a bad interception at the goal line in a close loss and came off the field repeating aloud over and over, 'I don't understand it.' The phrase '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 must be running through Favre's head now."

We idealize the story of the gifted young athlete rising to acclaim, because it's a story in which everything gets better and better: humble roots, initial success, finally fame and wealth. We don't like to think that such stories end with the athlete in decline, because this means the promise of youth has worn out and reminds us that we all ultimately face mortality.

Soon novice Green Bay head coach Mike McCarthy will face a dilemma he surely dreads: whether to bench his famed quarterback. Favre has 403 career touchdown passes, and needs 18 more to take the all-time touchdown pass record away from Marino. Since the Packers are unlikely to have a winning season, surely most of the state of Wisconsin wants to see Favre play every snap of his farewell year and bring home the all-time record. But a case can be made for handing the ball to Aaron Rodgers, Green Bay's quarterback of the future, and letting Rodgers get some experience so that 2007 might be a winning season for the Packers. Marino's final season was a playoff year, so he set the touchdown pass record honorably in



We were quarterbacks once,  
and young.

sports terms, in the course of propelling his team to a postseason berth. If Favre stays on the field merely to break a record, Packers fans will be glad, but the record could have some of the feeling of a stunt. Should the Packers be 2-6 a month from now, the dignified thing would be for Favre to remove his helmet and hold the clipboard for Rodgers.

In other quarterback news, the MAC rules! Reader Jeff Yoders of Chicago notes that with Toledo alum Bruce Gradkowski starting for the Bucs on Sunday, that makes five Mid-American Conference quarterbacks starting in the NFL. The others are Ben Roethlisberger from Miami of Ohio, Chad Pennington and Byron Leftwich from Marshall, and Charlie Frye from Akron. (Marshall left the MAC a year ago, but was a member when Pennington and Leftwich played there.) For years the MAC was derided as a second-tier organization, yet what football-factory conference has done as well recently sending quarterbacks to the big leagues? And of course, the MAC's Roethlisberger wears the latest Super Bowl ring.

Here's the only thing that worries me about the MAC: It seems to have disappeared from midweek games on ESPN. Tuesday and Wednesday night MAC games are, in some ways, my favorite football broadcasts of the year. They're in the middle of the week, when there are no other football distractions. They feature teams with rockets on their helmets playing teams with names like Ohio University of Miami at Ohio of Ohio. And, since they're college games, I don't have to take notes! But the MAC is strangely absent from the airwaves on Tuesdays and Wednesdays this season.

And in more quarterback news, since the moment Roethlisberger took the field to start in February's Super Bowl, he has thrown nine interceptions and no touchdown passes, while compiling a 38.3 passer rating. If every pass a quarterback throws clangs to the ground incomplete, he gets a 39.6 rating. Sure, Roethlisberger just won the Super Bowl and is 28-7 as an NFL starter. But the Steelers have lost three straight. How long till the Condiment Coliseum crowd starts chanting for Charlie Batch?

**Stat of the Week No. 1:** Chicago has outscored its opponents 156-36.

**Stat of the Week No. 2:** Stretching back to last season, since the day they won the NFC South, the Buccaneers have lost five straight.

**Stat of the Week No. 3:** In their two most recent meetings in New Jersey, the Giants have outscored the Redskins 55-3.

**Stat of the Week No. 4:** Seattle has a winning record despite being outscored.

**Stat of the Week No. 5:** Jeff Wilkins of St. Louis is on a pace to kick 58 field goals; the record for a season is 40.

**Stat of the Week No. 6:** Minnesota's defense outscored its offense Sunday.

**Stat of the Week No. 7:** (College edition.) There were eight missed field goal attempts as North Texas defeated Florida International in seven overtimes. Four of the seven overtimes were scoreless.

**Stat of the Week No. 8:** Since losing Randy Moss as a target, Daunte Culpepper has averaged 0.7 touchdown passes per game. In the three previous years, he averaged 1.8 touchdown passes per game.

**Stat of the Week No. 9:** Chicago has allowed 10 points or less in nine consecutive regular-season home games. In the one home playoff game during that span, Chicago allowed 29 points.

**Stat of the Week No. 10:** The Chicago Bears are the highest-scoring team in the NFL.

**Cheerleader of the Week:** Reader Rafael F. of Miami nominates [Diana of the Dolphins cheerleaders](#), a premed student at Florida International University. You don't bump into premed cheer-babes every day. According to her team bio, Diana's hobbies include "going to the beach, interior decorating and offering relationship advice." You can imagine her relationship column. "Dear Diana, my boyfriend is a nice guy, but all he wants to do on weekends is watch football. Plus when he stares at the babes on the [Miami Dolphins cheerleader calendar](#), he gets this faraway look. What should I do?"

**Sweet Play of the Week No. 1:** Blocking was great as Reggie Bush ran a fourth-quarter punt back 65 yards to allow the United States Saints to defeat Tampa. Earlier, Deuce McAllister ran for 57 yards after Bush lined up as a wide receiver and ran a fake end-around, drawing the Bucs' defense. Note to ESPN fact-checking department -- please verify that it's really true the Saints are 4-1.

**Sweet Play of the Week No. 2:** Game scoreless, St. Louis lined up heavy right on the Green Bay 6. Quarterback Marc Bulger and tailback Steven Jackson went right; the Rams' offensive line "slide" blocked right; suddenly Bulger stopped and zipped the ball to Torry Holt running a post from the left side, open because both safeties bit on the misdirection.

**Sweet Play of the Week No. 3:** Detroit trailing Minnesota 3-0 late in the first half, the Lions faced a third-and-7 on the Vikings' 8. Jon Kitna trotted up to the line and seemed to be looking around at the position of Minnesota's defensive backs; then he quick-snapped the ball and ran straight ahead on the naked quarterback sneak. Touchdown, because most Minnesota defenders hadn't even finished lining up. Note: Lions fans are complaining today about the illegal block penalty that nullified a long kick return touchdown that would have given Detroit a commanding lead. But the illegal block was the reason the play became a touchdown.

**Best Purist Drive:** On Tennessee's opening possession, the Titans rushed seven consecutive times to move 88 yards for a touchdown.

**Sour Play of the Week No. 1:** Game scoreless, Pittsburgh faced a fourth-and-6 on the San Diego 42. The Steelers lined up in punt formation, then punter Chris Gardocki split out as a wide receiver and the ball was direct-snapped to cornerback Bryant McFadden, who lost 2 yards. The fake failed because the Bolts were playing the fake. How could Pittsburgh expect to fool San Diego with a fake punt here? Well-coached special teams always assume a fake when a team lines up to punt on short yardage in opposition territory.

**Sour Play of the Week No. 2:** Trailing Minnesota 19-17 with 1:47 remaining, the Lions faced a fourth-and-10 at midfield. Kitna rolled left, tried to buy time and then, about to be tackled, heaved the ball up; interception returned for a touchdown, game over. On the play, Detroit's offensive linemen made their initial blocks, then just stood around watching Kitna scramble, making no attempt to help their quarterback with the game on the line and still wholly winnable. Blocking was also terrible on the sack that led to a Kitna fumble into the end zone, giving Minnesota an earlier touchdown. No Lion so much as touched Vikings defensive tackle Pat Williams, who knocked the ball loose.

**Sour Play of the Week No. 3:** With Jacksonville leading 21-0, the Jets stopped a third-and-goal from their 7, seeming to force a figgie attempt that would keep their dim hopes alive. But linebacker Jonathan Vilma was called for roughing the passer -- first down. Jax touchdown three snaps later, and TMQ wrote the words "game over" in his notebook. Often pass rushers who have failed to get the sack want to take out their frustrations by putting a lick on the quarterback. But Vilma used the body-slam move, which is specifically prohibited and impossible for officials to miss. What a dumb play.

**Sweet Player of the Week:** From the Buffalo 8-yard line, Bernard Berrian ran a perfect slant pattern, touchdown. Later he ran a perfect out-and-up for a 62-yard gain. Berrian is averaging 21.7 yards per reception. A red-hot wide receiver for the *Chicago Bears*?

**Sour Player of the Week:** Cleveland trailing Carolina 14-3, the Browns had the ball at midfield with 13 seconds remaining in the first half. Extremely highly overpaid, underproductive, highly drafted tight end Kellen Winslow made no attempt to block, and simply turned around and watched as Cats defenders sacked Charlie Frye and caused a fumble. Later, in the fourth quarter, Carolina led 20-12, but the Browns had advanced to the Panthers' 29. Frye underthrew Winslow, and the extremely highly overpaid, underproductive, highly drafted tight end simply watched the interception, making no attempt to break up the pass. Note: Carolina is 3-2 despite converting just 19 percent of its third downs, the worst such rate in the league.

**A Tale of Two Fades:** "Dad, why don't you like the jump-ball fade at the goal line?" So asked Spenser, the Official Youngest Child of TMQ, as we watched the games on Sunday. The jump-ball fade at the goal line is one of the trendiest plays in football. But if this play is such a great idea, why don't teams do it anywhere else on the field? Why strictly at the goal line? Even when the matchup is a tall receiver against a short corner, the jump-ball fade seems as likely to fail as succeed -- and at the goal line, teams should be using high-percentage plays. Anyway, the Ravens and Broncos conducted a clinic on this Monday night in the rain in Denver. Game tied at 3, Baltimore faced a third-and-9 on the Denver 10, and threw a jump-ball fade to the 6-foot-6 Clarence Moore; the 6-foot Champ Bailey outjumped Moore for the interception. With Denver leading 6-3 with two minutes remaining, the Broncos faced a second-and-goal on the 4, the call was a jump-ball fade to the 6-foot Rod Smith covered by the 6-1 Chris McAlister; Smith outjumped McAlister for the game-icing touchdown. So in two demonstrations of this play, the tall receiver failed and the average-height receiver succeeded. What does that prove? I have no idea.

This morning Denver ranks 12th in defense by the NFL's "total defense" metric, but second by the more important metric of points allowed. Everyone knows the Broncos have surrendered only one touchdown in four games. They've been stingy with field goals too, allowing a spectacularly low 8.5 points per game. Note that Denver's defenders have not been flashy -- the Broncos' defense is close to the bottom of the league in both takeaways and sacks. And note that Denver is blitzing a lot less than last season, which seems to help. Denver is getting its great defensive performance the old-fashioned way, by tackling really well and covering really well. Old-fashioned defense has more staying power than blitz-happy defense, so this would seem to be a good sign for the Broncos' 2006 prospects.

**Nicole Kidman Called a Press Conference To Declare She Did Not Seek Publicity:** "She says she was unfairly branded as a publicity seeker." So wrote Damon Darlin of the New York Times, describing former Hewlett Packard CEO Carly Fiorina. Where does Fiorina complain of being unfairly branded as a publicity seeker? *In her book about herself*, whose cover is her own picture. Darlin reports that the new book, "Tough Choices," consists mainly of Fiorina praising herself. Write a book of self-praise with your picture on the cover -- yes, there's a way to prove you are not



NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell orders investigation of Chicago Bears' touchdowns.

a publicity seeker. (We "sign" a book of self-praise is better phrasing, since it's unlikely Fiorina did the writing.) In the current ethos, saying you don't seek publicity has become a form of self-promotion; celebrities and the wealthy go on "Larry King Live" to assert that they don't want attention. My all-time favorite was a 1999 Newsweek cover about Nicole Kidman, in which she complained bitterly that she didn't have enough privacy. Not only had she agreed to be on the cover of Newsweek to declare her desire for privacy, but what was she doing the week the story ran? Performing nude in a play in London.

Fiorina's book is one of many examples of the author-on-the-cover trend in publishing. Former Citigroup CEO Sanford Weill also has a new as-told-to book, and also features his own visage on the cover. Usually authors-on-the-cover are celebrities whose faces are recognizable; since neither Fiorina nor Weill have known faces, my bet is they campaigned for author-on-the-cover out of vanity, since it implies celeb status. Here are TMQ's Iron Laws of Author-on-the-Cover: First, books whose "authors" are on the cover are almost never actually written by the person presented as author. Second, the larger the author-on-the-cover photo, the worse the book.

CEO self-pity note: Fiorina also complains of being insufficiently appreciated by the Hewlett Packard board. For her five years as CEO, she was paid about \$36 million; when she was forced out, she got a \$21 million severance payment, plus \$50,000 to spend on "career counseling." But they didn't appreciate me! Maybe the Hewlett Packard board wasn't kneeling when it handed her the money.

**Matt Leinart Omen?** Alex Smith, first overall choice of the 2005 draft, did not throw a touchdown pass until his seventh start. Matt Leinart, who would have been the first choice in 2005 if he'd come out, threw for a touchdown on his second pass attempt as a pro. In that Chiefs-Cardinals game, check the late fourth-quarter 78-yard screen pass to Larry Johnson that enabled Kansas City to pull out the win, and note that it's a weakside screen. Coaches usually call screens to the strong side, but TMQ always has preferred weakside screens. There are two fewer people (one less defender and one less blocker) on the weak side for the runner to avoid. And though this game was announced as a sellout in the desert, there were many empty seats as Neil Rackers honked a field goal to try to tie the game on the final play. Hey Arizona fans, stick around for the ending!

**Why Tactics Matter:** After Week 2, TMQ noted that trailing Seattle 21-3 in the fourth quarter, Dennis Green kept calling runs as if trying to kill the clock. Sunday, the Cardinals entered the fourth quarter leading the Chiefs 20-10 -- and in the final quarter called 19 passes and four runs, repeatedly stopping the clock and allowing Kansas City time for its comeback.

**Hidden Plays:** Hidden plays are ones that never make highlight reels, but stop or sustain drives. Tennessee leading the Colts 13-7, the Flaming Thumbtacks faced second-and-6 on their 13 with 11:27 remaining. Vince Young threw for a first down, but tight end Bo Scaife was called for holding. Pushed backward, the Titans ended up punting two plays later, Indianapolis returning the kick to the Tennessee 43 and setting up the touchdown drive that swung the game to the Colts.

**When Researchers Projected Magnetic Fields Into Dick Cheney's Brain, He Became Friendly:** Economists call it the Ultimate Game, and have long contended it proves Homo sapiens insufficiently logical. Here's the situation. Two strangers are brought together by a third person who holds \$1,000. He tells them the money is theirs to divide on these terms: Stranger A must propose how to split the \$1,000, and Stranger B must either accept or reject A's offer. That concludes the game, no second round. Classical economists maintain Stranger A should say, "I propose that I get \$999 and you get \$1," and Stranger B should immediately respond, "I accept." Pure economic theory says A should maximize his gain by shafting B out of every possible farthing, while B

should calculate that since his sole choice is between \$1 and nothing, \$1 is better. Yet researchers have played this game with volunteers in many nations, and it never works the way theory says. The bare-minimum offer is *always* rejected. Generally, A must offer at least 30 percent or B says no and both players get nothing. Classical economists have long harrumphed that B's response when the game is played with real money shows human beings are too emotional and insufficiently focused on maximizing outcomes.

This pot was stirred last week when researchers led by Dario Knoch of the University of Zurich reported that using magnets to disrupt the right prefrontal cortex of volunteers playing Stranger B [caused them](#) to become much more willing to accept low offers. Now, if someone was using magnetic waves to scramble parts of your brain, your bargaining skills might decline, too. ("Herr Professor Doktor, ve haff discovered zat when ve knock der volunteers unconscious mit ein sledgehammer, zey refuse to aufgeparticipatehaffen\* in the experiment.") But I think tests like the University of Zurich study only point to the Ultimate Game being so flawed that it mainly shows us faults of classical economics.

First, the game assumes money is superior to all other forms of possessions, including psychological well-being. But the world doesn't work that way. If I am Stranger B and accept the \$1 offer, I have a dollar bill but also feel like a total dupe: And how can being made to feel like a dupe be worth a mere dollar? Any small-percentage offer accepted by B would make B feel unhappy and taken advantage of, while rejecting the small-percentage offer gives B the pleasure of feeling retribution was achieved against A. Once the offer gets up to around 30 percent, then the value of the money might equal whatever unpleasant thoughts B will experience when seeing A cackling and counting a larger pile of loot. Reactions like rejecting very low offers do not, as classical economists maintain, show that B fails to understand economics. They show that B understands money is not everything!

Next, people in the B role might derive long-term benefits from refusing low offers, and these benefits might exceed the value of the money forgone. In his important new book "The Origin of Wealth," Eric Beinhocker speculates that the kind of circumstances in which B refuses a too-low offer are "the cornerstone for social cooperation that is essential for wealth creation." In order for the free market to serve the overall welfare of society, Beinhocker maintains, all must mutually agree not to participate in arrangements that exploit those with weak bargaining positions. Society must be structured such that A would feel ashamed of offering only \$1 to B, and would offer a fair sum in order to feel good about the transaction. If parties in strong positions offer fair sums, the result is mutually beneficial trading for everyone, including the strong. (Are you listening, Wal-Mart?) "The Origin of Wealth" is a major new book that ought to be commanding significant attention. Beinhocker, a management consultant for McKinsey & Company, argues persuasively that market economics is not a war of all against all. Market economies do best, Beinhocker says, and the welfare of society rises most, when people voluntarily take each other's interests into account.

Finally, TMQ contends economists misunderstand their own Ultimate Game because the focus of discussion is always on what Stranger B will accept. The key to this puzzle is not B but Stranger A - - who is a total, utter idiot for offering only \$1 because this insures A gets nothing! Offers in which A seeks to claim the lion's share are irrational on A's part, because such offers will fail. I would argue there is only one wise offer for A to make: that they each get \$500. A 50/50 split is sure to be accepted, thus insuring Stranger A of pocketing \$500. A fair-minded person playing the A role would offer a 50/50 split because it is fair; economically this is also the logical move, because it guarantees a successful transaction. By focusing on whether B will accept an inequitable offer,

economists skip over how dumb it is for A to make such an offer. By contrast, fairness leads to benefits for both parties, which is the big point of "The Origin of Wealth."

(\*Note: Tuesday Morning Quarterback has long contended that any verb can be converted into pseudo-German using the formula aufgeXXXXXhaffen. Thus to jog becomes to aufgejoggenhaffen, etc.)

**We're All Professionals Here:** Andrew Walter of Oakland committed turnovers on consecutive downs, throwing an interception that led to a San Francisco score and losing a fumble on the Raiders' first snap after the kickoff. Marques Tuiasosopo then came on for Walter and threw two interceptions in nine pass attempts.

**We're All Professionals Here No. 2:** On the opening possession of the Bills/Bears collision, Buffalo drove to second-and-1 on the Chicago 42. The Bills threw incomplete, then rushed for no gain, then committed a penalty on a botched fourth-down try, then fumbled the snap on a botched fake-punt attempt; Chicago ball on the Buffalo 40. Later, on a second-quarter possession, the Bills lost yardage on three consecutive downs. Tactics note: Seven of J.P. Losman's first 11 passes were thrown toward Lee Evans. When his 12th pass also went toward Evans, three Chicago Bears were covering the gentleman. Interception.

**But Then, Hollywood Is Hanging By Its Fingertips:** Divorced by computer-animated special effects from such tedium as laws of physics, modern moviemaking now offers far too many scenes of heroes hanging by their fingertips from the tops of skyscrapers and other impossibly tall objects. "You can't be a Hollywood star anymore unless you've hung by your fingertips off the top of something in a totally unrealistic way," I wrote in 2004, yet "the scenes are monotonous because they are so obviously fake." My guess is that not one single actual person has ever hung by his fingertips from the top of a skyscraper, but Tom Cruise, Hugh Jackman, Sylvester Stallone and many other box-office names recently have done so. Or to be precise, have been made to appear to have done so. In the chick flick "Kate and Leopold," two characters had a relationship talk while hanging by their fingertips off the edge of the Brooklyn Bridge. Even King Kong hung by his paw-tips from a cliff, while holding Naomi Watts, in the recent Peter Jackson remake.

The most preposterous hanging-by-the-fingertips scene yet comes in "Stormbreaker," which opens in most cities Friday. Teen Brit secret agent Alex Rider (played by Alex Pettyfer) hangs by one hand from the top of a London skyscraper while holding Sabina Pleasure (Sarah Bolger), who's dangling in the air, with his other hand. Rider is shown supporting the body weights of two people solely by gripping a rope with one hand; this would be physically impossible even for someone with the strength of a champion weightlifter. Scenes like this aren't "spectacular," they're stupid, because they are OBVIOUSLY phony. [Here](#), I break down how many special-effect scenes of recent action movies are physically impossible. My contention is that Hollywood special effects were much more fun when they had to be done by stunt people. Now that they're simulated by computers and obviously fake, who cares? Note: TMQ believes the first football-themed James Bond movie should be called "Tiebreaker."

Also crossing over from fun to boring is computer animation. There have now been about 15 consecutive computer-animated movies in which celebrities do voice-overs for sassy, wisecracking animals loose in the city or suburbs. The first eight or nine of these all-but-identical movies might have been amusing; the most recent bunch belly-flopped at the box office. Gee, wonder why?

**Terrell Owens Humiliation Analysis:** Drew Bledsoe threw toward Owens 13 times. The results: two interceptions, three dropped passes, three receptions for 45 yards, no touchdowns. On both interceptions, the ball was underthrown and Owens, rather than fight to break up the pass, passively

watched it get picked off. After the second interception Owens passively watched, he screamed at teammates and assistant coaches on the sideline. The guys on the sideline were not the ones who could have broken up the pass. Actual Owens statement at the postgame press conference: "Maybe I need to work harder."

**Dallas-Philadelphia Endgame Analysis:** One thousand one, one thousand two, one thousand three, one thousand four, one thousand five, one thousand six, one thousand seven, one thousand eight, one thousand nine. Drew Bledsoe held the ball for *nine seconds* before being sacked with 1:57 remaining, and Dallas trailing 31-24. Ummm -- don't blame that sack on the offensive line. Now it's fourth-and-18 for the Cowboys on their 37 with 47 seconds remaining, and rather than hurry to the line, Dallas calls its final timeout. Terry Glenn runs a square-in-up, and Philadelphia explicably falls for it, playing the short pass. There are 47 seconds left in the game, where oh where might the pass go? *Maybe up the field!* Glenn is behind everyone and running for the tying touchdown; Eagles' safety Michael Lewis commits deliberate pass interference. Now it's first-and-goal Dallas on the Philadelphia 6 with 35 seconds remaining. Why not surprise Philadelphia with a run? Instead incompleteness then an interception returned for a 102-yard touchdown. Using the last time out may have helped Dallas come up with the play that converted the fourth-and-18, but meant that at the goal line, the Cowboys were locked in to passing. Philadelphia was dropping seven men into coverage, and made Dallas pay.

**'Tis Better to Have Rushed and Lost Than Never to Have Rushed At All:** Trailing 21-17 early in the second half, the Philadelphia Nesharim faced third-and-inches and threw & incompleteness, punt. Run the ball for an inch already! Philadelphia is TMQ's bete noire: pass-wacky and blitz-happy, yet constantly winning. Basically, the Eagles ruin all my theories, though their cheerleaders do compensate for a lot. Throwing little dinky-dunk passes when the length of the football is needed is going to come back to haunt this team, you mark my words.

**Shiloh Nouvel Jolie-Pitt Will Grow Up Wishing She Was ESPN "SportsCenter" Jolie-Pitt :** The Associated Press reported that in the last 12 months, at least four babies have been named ESPN, including ESPN Real, born last week in Biloxi, Miss. Parents Leann and Rusty Real will pronounce the boy's name "Espen." Weirdly, ESPN Real sounds like a name destined for fame.

**Luckily for the Giants, They Don't Get Along:** In its final month of the 2005 season, Washington averaged 30 points per game. So during the offseason, Chainsaw Dan Snyder decreed that the Redskins' offense needed a makeover. He hired a new offensive coordinator who installed a new system, plus invested huge amounts of money and multiple draft choices to acquire glamour players Antwaan Randle El, Brandon Lloyd and T.J. Duckett. Sunday, the Redskins scored three points as Randle El, Lloyd and Duckett combined to gain exactly 10 yards. Is it just impossible for Snyder to leave well enough alone? Had Washington's owner simply done nothing during the offseason, flying to some private island he owns or perhaps to some small country he owns, lying on the beach drinking blueberry-almond martinis, it's likely the Washington offense would be performing better. Trading third-round draft picks for Lloyd and Duckett was especially puzzling. The Niners had lost interest in Lloyd -- he's talented but self-centered -- and Duckett always has talked a lot better than he plays. Since arriving in Washington, Duckett has complained nonstop; there's a reason the Falcons did not want him in their locker room anymore. To free up money for these no-accounts, Snyder released Walt Harris and Robert Royal, two accomplished veterans playing well for their new teams. Sunday, the Redskins couldn't even block. Michael Strahan got his first sack of the season as very highly overpaid right tackle Jon Jansen blocked no one at all, leaving reserve tight end Christian Fauria to deal with Strahan.

As for the Giants, they spent their bye week bickering in public -- always a good sign! Tuesday Morning Quarterback's longstanding belief is that because the Giants represent the boroughs of New York City, which is the world capital of arguing, the G-Man franchise always performs well when its players and coaches are quarreling. When the Giants are peaceful? Fuggedaboutit.

**NCAA Postpones Discussion of Literacy Rule to Spend More Time Objecting to Feathers:**

Often the NCAA looks the other way as big schools make only token attempts to educate D-I football and men's basketball scholarship athletes. But put a feather in your cap and you're asking for trouble! Recently the NCAA ruled that the feathers on the [William & Mary athletic logo](#) must be removed because they are offensive. We're not talking about disparaging caricatures of American Indians, which are indeed offensive; the William & Mary logo contains only images of *feathers*. Has the NCAA actually found one single person anywhere on Earth who claims to be offended by a drawing of feathers? Maybe birds were offended! Then again, the NCAA has a reason to want to get even with William & Mary: This academics-oriented college plays in Division I and graduates its athletes, thus creating uncomfortable comparisons for the NCAA's money-factory schools. In the [most recent NCAA stats](#), William & Mary graduated 98 percent of its Division I-AA football players and 92 percent of its Division I men's basketball players. Hey sports studs, want to attend a major university without going to class? Chances are you will get away with it. But should you draw a feather, the wrath of Khan will descend upon you.

**The Football Gods Chortled:** "Eric Parker is a sure-handed receiver, he never drops the ball" -- Al Michaels on Sunday night, referring to the San Diego receiver. Parker dropped the next pass thrown to him.

**TMQ in the News:** I can now lay claim to the distinction of being the first ESPN columnist quoted in the scholarly journal [Arms Control Today](#).

**Miami Quarterback-O-Meter:** Miami quarterbacks Daunte Culpepper and Joey Harrington, both high No. 1 draft choices, have combined to throw two touchdown passes in five games. Harrington's first interception against New England was ghastly; he telegraphed the pass so badly he practically slapped a shipping label on it. The second interception was not Harrington's fault; it bounced cleanly off Wesley Welker's hands. Don't overlook that the Miami defense played an outstanding game on the road; the Dolphins sure are down at 1-4, but maybe not out.

**Wacky Beer of the Week:** Award categories at the recent [Great American Beer Festival](#) in Denver included "coffee-flavored beer" and "fruit and vegetable beer." Mesquite-flavored beer was also entered.

**Adventures in Officiating:** Three snaps after Harrington's second interception, pass interference against Will Allen put the ball at the Marine Mammals' 1, setting up the Patriots' icing touchdown. Yes, Allen collided with the receiver, but Allen had turned around and was trying to intercept the ball. The defender can collide with the receiver if in the act of playing the ball. On Maurice Jones-Drew's 4-yard touchdown run that put Jax ahead of Jersey/B 21-0, replay review focused on whether the ball broke the plane, which it did. But Jones-Drew's knee was down! Often in goal-line situations, everyone including the zebras focuses on the position of the ball. Once the knee is down, the position of the ball is not supposed to matter.

**Reverse Discrimination in the NFL?** A study published in the Journal of Law, Economics and Organization contends NFL teams discriminate against African-Americans on draft day. The study, by Michael Conlin of Michigan State University and Patrick Emerson of the University of Colorado at Denver, [looking at many years of the NFL draft](#), compared how high black and white players were selected to how many games each eventually started. Obviously there are white NFL draft

choices who are fabulous and black draft choices who are terrible. But on the whole, Conlin and Emerson found, white players were favored in the draft, tending to be selected higher than seemed justified by their professional performance, as judged by eventual starts.

"The results provide strong evidence that hiring discrimination is prevalent among NFL teams," the authors found, "hiring" in this sense meaning drafting. Pro football front offices, the study speculates, tend to overestimate the potential of white collegians and underestimate the potential of African-American prospects. Once rosters are set, Conlin and Emerson found, discrimination disappears -- coaches play the best performers regardless of race, and the value of contract offers to established veterans has no racial component. Race-blind drafting, in turn, seemed related to winning: "We find some evidence that teams that [favor whites during drafting] win fewer games in subsequent seasons."

Tuesday Morning Quarterback had an objection to the methodology of the study, in which draft-class analysis stopped at 1991. This was done so that enough time had passed that all drafted players had completed their careers, allowing their starts to be totaled. But the result is that Conlin's and Emerson's numbers come from the period when African-American college quarterbacks were objects of active bias. Bias against black quarterbacks is now over, and thus the whites-favoring draft phenomenon for this position should be less today than in the period the researchers studied. Equally, it seems fair to say that in decades past, NFL front offices sought white high draft choices on the theory that many white fans were biased against blacks, so white stars were needed to attract suburbanites to games. Today, spectator prejudice against African-American players no longer seems an issue in any part of the country. Fans just want their teams to win, and there no longer seems any pattern of white fans preferring to root for white players. Still, the study offers numerical substantiation that race remains more of an issue in the NFL than most of us would care to think.

Looking for an academic study of the NFL that's not upsetting? [Here, three researchers require 29 pages](#) to show that losing coaches get fired.

**Obscure College Score of the Week:** New York Maritime 66, Walter Reed 6. There's a famous military hospital called Walter Reed, but according to the College Board database, no institution of higher learning by that name. So who exactly was New York Maritime playing against? New York Maritime's athletic teams are the [Privateers](#). Don't navies want to sink privateers? Course options at Maritime include [Collision Avoidance](#).

**Obscure College Score of the Week No. 2:** Wisconsin-La Crosse 28, Wisconsin-Platteville 21. Four interstate games took place Saturday, as Wisconsin-Eau Claire beat Wisconsin-Falls River, Wisconsin-Oshkosh beat Wisconsin-Stout and Wisconsin-Whitewater beat Wisconsin-Stevens Point. According to the school's Web site, there are an incredible [180 events scheduled at Wisconsin-La Crosse today](#), including the mysterious "Inside Iraq Promotion."

**Obscure College Score of the Week No. 3:** Nebraska Wesleyan 19, Doane 0. Reader Barbara Grunwald of Clovis, Calif., a Nebraska Wesleyan grad, notes her school boasts of being "Ranked the number one liberal arts college in Nebraska by U.S. News." She adds, "Of course, we won't discuss how many liberal arts colleges there are in Nebraska."

**Running Up the Score Watch:** Last Tuesday, TMQ covered the insipid stunt pulled by Matewan High of West Virginia, which ran up the score to 64-0 over Burch High, a tiny rural school, so a Matewan tailback could claim a record 658 yards gained in a game. Three days later, the [Washington Post provided detail](#) on just how bad Matewan's bad sportsmanship was. Despite an insurmountable lead, Matewan coach Yogi Kinder had his team use a hurry-up, no-huddle throughout the second half in order to run up the score and compile yards. This, against an

overmatched little school that had not scored a point against Matewan in seven years, and could barely dress enough players for the game. I've heard many stories about high school coaches who were egotistical jerks, but Yogi Kinder tops them all. It is not just blowing smoke to say that high school sports exist to teach fair play and competitive ethics. Instead of setting a good example, the football staff at this high school made the town name "Matewan" nationally synonymous with "bad sportsmanship." Meanwhile, let's not let Paul McCoy, the kid who ran for the 658 yards, off the hook just because his coach lacks standards. Paul, you participated in a cheap, shoddy spectacle you knew was intended to humiliate a weak opponent.

And where was the guy in the white cap while all this was happening? The National Federation of High Schools 2006 Football Rules Book states, in Section 9, Article 3, "Neither team shall commit any act which, in the opinion of the referee, tends to make a travesty of the game." The head official present was derelict in not stopping the turning of the game into a travesty. Rule 9.3 is the most sweeping in football -- violation can be punished by "any penalty the referee considers equitable," from multiple flags per down to forfeiture of the contest. Yet the officials did nothing, allowing the integrity of the game to be mocked. Holy mackerel, what an all-around embarrassment. Headlines said ALL-TIME HIGH SCHOOL RUSHING RECORD. They should have read, ALL-TIME LOW POINT FOR HIGH SCHOOL SPORTS OCCURS IN WEST VIRGINIA TOWN. Football gods note: Bad sportsmanship is always punished. On Friday night, Matewan was held to seven points and defeated by Tug Valley, a high school Matewan, the local power, had never lost to before.

**Running Up the Score Justified:** In Virginia prep action Saturday, West Potomac High School beat West Springfield 81-74 in four overtimes. The game featured 21 touchdowns, two field goals, two deuces and 19-for-19 PAT kicking. Imagine how it feels to be on a football team that scored 74 points and lost.

**Reader Animadversion:** Got a complaint or a deeply held grievance? Write me at [TMQ\\_ESPN@yahoo.com](mailto:TMQ_ESPN@yahoo.com). Include your real name and the name of your hometown, and I may quote you by name unless you instruct me otherwise. Note: giving your hometown improves your odds of being quoted.

**Next Week:** West Potomac High School challenges the Chicago Bears to an exhibition match.

**Wednesday, October 11, 2006**

TMQ Nation fires back

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By Gregg Easterbrook

Yesterday, Tuesday Morning Quarterback razed the NCAA for demanding that William & Mary remove two feathers from its athletic logo -- a demand that seems like a "Saturday Night Live" satire of political correctness. A few hours after the column was posted, William & Mary announced it was giving up and would take off the feathers. Further resistance would require suing the NCAA, and the college said it cannot justify spending parents' money on the matter -- especially since the NCAA, backed by the deep pockets of the football factories, seems willing to invest substantial resources to get its way. As **Daphne Cooper of Bluffton, S.C.** notes, "William & Mary thinks money is best used for education, while the NCAA thinks money is best used to increase its financial control over what was once amateur collegiate sports." The NCAA ruled that Florida State may keep the Indian-themed feather on its helmet, and the University of Utah may keep its Utes nickname and two-feathers logo -- yet is adamant the feathers come off William & Mary's helmets. But then, Florida State and Utah football are money machines. **Nathan Verilla of Richmond, Va.** puts it, "The NCAA's efforts to police Native American nicknames and logos is a sham. It has nothing to do with the actual nicknames or logos and everything to do with which schools bring in the money. Never mind that the majority of Native Americans don't really care about Native American imagery in sports and that the groups working to alter sports images should better spend their time on the real problems facing Native Americans today -- alcoholism, suicide, unemployment, lack of political power. If the NCAA was serious about removing Native American imagery from their member schools, it would have forced every college with such imagery to change their nicknames and logos, instead of caving to the football factories while bullying small schools like William & Mary."

Even by the standards of the NCAA, an organization that has made its name synonymous with double standards, the campaign against William & Mary's feathers seems a fool's errand. My guess is the NCAA wanted to claim it was taking dramatic action about Indian imagery, but was afraid to pick on big-money schools, so picked on the little guy. Great job of setting an example, Myles Brand! Also, William & Mary perennially embarrasses the NCAA by playing in Division I and graduating almost all scholarship athletes -- 98 percent of the school's Division I-AA football players graduated [in the latest stats](#). Florida State by contrast does an atrocious job, graduating just 52 percent of its football scholarship holders. Florida State treats education for football players as a big joke, and the NCAA lavishes special favors on that school; whereas graduate your athletes and the NCAA will punish you! Gene Nichol, president of William and Mary, [said yesterday](#), "It is galling that a university with such a consistent and compelling record of doing intercollegiate athletics the



Do you see much difference?

right way is threatened with punishment by an organization whose own house, simply put, is not in order." My suggestion to William & Mary faithful: Start wearing feathers to games.

**Norman Carmichael of Columbus, Ohio** writes, "How could you not comment on Joe Gibbs punting on fourth-and-6 from the Jersey/A 37, trailing 6-3? Or ordering a field goal attempt from the Jersey/A 23 on fourth-and-1, when trailing 16-3?" Worse, the field goal attempt was by John Hall, a kicker who's been struggling and who yesterday was placed on IR. Even had the figgie succeeded, the Skins would have trailed by two scores. Outraged, the football gods pushed the kick wide.

Describing last Saturday's many Wisconsin-on-Wisconsin games in the state's public university system, I called them "interstate" pairings. Many cheese-wise readers including **Jenny Ritchey of Madison, Wisc.** noted "intrastate" is correct. **Jon Allison of Chicago** writes, "The column and the reader feedback are perfect for the rush-hour ride home on the El from downtown Chicago. I've been trying to think of a decent nickname for Rex Grossman, now that he's helped turn the Bears into an offensive force. Here it is: Score-a-saurus Rex." **Roman Picheta of Warsaw, Poland** notes the [Polish American Football Association](#) recently had its inaugural game, as the Warsaw Eagles faced the Wielkopolska Fireballs in Lodz.

I wrote that excessive attention to high school football might start that wonderful sport down the path to ruin. **Jessica Lopez of Albuquerque, N.M.** reminds, "Shoe companies have already shown they don't care about education as they tempt high schoolers to skip college by offering huge shoe deals up front. Why would anybody want to learn about sociology or biology when they can make millions of dollars for wearing a shoe?" I cited the new show "Friday Night Lights", a well-made if puzzling show -- more on that soon -- as an example of the rising profile of high school football. **Matt Keeling of Falmouth, Mass.** countered, "In the early 1980s one of my all-time favorite shows, 'The White Shadow,' premiered on TV. It was about an ex-NBA player coaching a bunch of misfit, multi-ethnic high school students and was a huge hit. Yet it didn't lead to the ever expanding media coverage of high school basketball players. The players didn't get involved with agents, drug dealers, shoe companies and underage groupies. NBA teams didn't begin to recruit younger and younger players based on potential instead of performance, and in the process degrade the integrity and level of play in what was once the most exciting pro sports league. No sir, none of those things happened." TMQ also said that one of the great aspects of high school football is that parking is free. **Sal Capaccio of Englewood, Fla.**, a high school football coach, counters that in most of Florida, high schools charge \$3 for parking during games.

TMQ asked why the referee didn't use the "travesty" rule to stop the West Virginia high school that went no-huddle throughout the second half in order to run up the score to 64-0. **Vince Blanchard of Hawkesbury, Ontario** writes, "As a basketball official I have often encountered coaches who insist on trying to run up the score on weaker opposition by using a full-court press when well ahead late in the game. When this happens any good official will put a stop to it by calling the slightest contact a foul. This gives the losing team opportunities for free throws, producing the opposite of the desired result and a quick stop to the tactics. Sometimes an aside to the coach to 'take your press off' is all that is needed." Meanwhile **Marcus Cooper of Denver** notes you can use the [guestbook of Matewan High School](#), the school that pulled the no-huddle stunt, to register your view of its notion of sportsmanship. Take a look-see at the prevailing opinion. Matewan High: Has it occurred to you that the dignified thing would be to issue an apology?

I called Yuri Gagarin "the first member of the genus Homo" to reach space. **Dan Drew of Trumbull, Conn.** points out that a few months before Gagarin's 1961 flight, Ham the chimpanzee soared into space aboard a U.S. rocket. Ham, he contends, was "the first member of the genus

Homo" to leave our little rock. Taxonomists traditionally place chimps into genus *Pan*, but recent research showing human and chimpanzee DNA is 99.4 percent alike eventually will lead to chimps entering the human genus, Drew thinks. Ham was trained to pull levers in response to flashing lights and did so throughout his flight, establishing that space travel would not render astronauts incapable of operating controls. Pulling levers in response to flashing lights -- sounds like your office, doesn't it?

**Peter Kilkelly of Waterville, Maine** writes, "As further evidence of your theory about the amount of clothing worn by a team's cheerleaders helping determine who wins the game, check out the [New England Patriots' page](#) comparing what their cheerleaders wore for the Denver game, a loss, and the Buffalo game, a victory." **Risa Balayem of Detroit**, an official at Ford Field, wrote, "Just wanted to let you know that the MAC games will return to ESPN on Tuesdays and Wednesdays in November." The Toledo Rockets play three consecutive Tuesday nights on ESPN that month. Let the Tuesday and Wednesday night games begin!

On science fiction shows saving money by having the aliens take human form -- on "Battlestar Galactica," of all possible choices, the evil Cylon living robots by the strangest coincidence decided to make themselves look exactly like people -- **Nicole Rejiester** points out, "In the original 1960s 'Star Trek,' the Klingons looked like nothing more than slightly wrinkly humans. It wasn't until Star Trek movies, with higher budgets, that Klingons took on an alien appearance." **Paul Poage of Portland, Oregon** adds that in the old television miniseries "V," the aliens also by the strangest and most amazing coincidence had taken on the appearance of people.

Tuesday Morning Quarterback supposed that the safest off-price generic prediction would be annually to predict that all teams would finish with the same record as the season before. **Eric DeGroot of Appleton, Wisc.** conducted an incredibly scientifically advanced analysis of this conjecture: "I analyzed the last 20 years of records in the NFL to test your theory. I looked at exact match in records and a one game difference in record from the previous year. Here are my findings: Best results for predicting the same records -- 6-24 predicting the 1998 season based on 1997 records. Worst results for predicting the same records -- 0-32 predicting the 2005 season based on 2004 records. Best record for predicting within one game -- 15-15 predicting the 1996 season based on 1995 records. Worst record for predicting within one game -- 4-28 predicting the 2005 season based on 2004 records. Seven teams have never had the same record two years in a row in the last 20 years: Jets, Giants, Ravens, Texans, Panthers, Rams and Lions. In the last 20 years the Packers have had the same record back-to-back five times." OK, so next year I will predict that Green Bay will have the same record as in 2006, while the Jets, Giants, Ravens, Texans, Panthers, Rams and Lions will not.

**Rafae Khan of Montpelier, Vt.** notes, "A lot was made of the Manning Bowl, but that is only one of five games the Giants play this year that involves brother vs. brother. There are Peyton versus Eli Manning, Tim Hasselbeck versus Matt Hasselbeck, Sinorice Moss versus Santana Moss (twice) and Tiki Barber versus Ronde Barber. That has to be some kind of record." **Peter Laub of Columbus, Ohio** notes that in Bob Woodward's new "State of Denial" -- you're forgiven if you have not yet plowed through all 560 pages -- Col. Steve Rotkoff, a military intelligence officer, is quoted as having written a haiku about Donald Rumsfeld. Here it is from the book, bowdlerized:

*Rumsfeld is a d---*

*Won't flow the forces we need:*

*We will be too light.*

Be sure to read [this piece](#) by Jacob Weisberg of Slate, who analyzes the changing portrayal of the defense secretary in Woodward's three books about the George W. Bush presidency. In the first book, Weisberg shows, Woodward presented Rumsfeld as an awesome titan striding across the landscape; in the second, as a fabulous manager; in the third, as an incompetent idiot. Did Rumsfeld really change from mastermind to dolt in five years? Weisberg thinks he's been the same all along. What changed, Weisberg supposes, is that Rumsfeld gave Woodward extensive access to Pentagon corridors of power for the first book; talked to him somewhat for the second; froze him out for the third. Woodward has an established pattern of heaping fawning praise on those who make him feel important, while slamming those who don't. Rumsfeld ought to know this about Woodward. So the fact that the defense secretary wouldn't cozy up for the most recent book is another indicator Rumsfeld is out of touch.



Rummy looks kinda crummy.

**Karen Locascio of Boston** complains of my saying the Jets played a game at The Meadowlands: "The Meadowlands complex is made up of three separate facilities: Giants Stadium, Continental Airlines Arena and Meadowlands Racetrack. When the Jets play at the Meadowlands complex, they are in Giants Stadium. There's technically no such thing as Meadowlands Stadium." May it please the court, I introduce into evidence [the league's official Game Book from the Jets' home opener](#), which refers to the stadium as The Meadowlands. The league calls the place Giants Stadium when Jersey/A plays there and The Meadowlands when Jersey/B performs. With the Jets and Giants negotiating details of the new facility to be built in the same place, my understanding is that a sticking point is Jersey/B's insistence it be called Jets Stadium when they are performing. The alternative would be to sell a corporate name for both teams and have the facility always called YouTube Field at Google Pointe or something.

Finally, **Alan Higgins of Nashville, Tenn.** writes, "I am a plebe at the United States Naval Academy and have found your column very helpful. Every morning the plebes have chow calls. For these chow calls we must have memorized a number of things, including three articles from national news, international news and sports. I have just started to read Tuesday Morning Quarterback and enjoy the fact that it contains so much information I can do an entire week on one column alone. From a grateful plebe to you, thank you and keep them coming."

**Monday, October 16, 2006**

**Updated: October 18, 3:42 PM ET**

It's hard work blowing that lead

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By Gregg Easterbrook

When my two football-crazed boys got up early this morning I said, "Guys, Arizona was ahead by 20 and had the ball on the last play of the third quarter." Immediately both said, "And the Cardinals lost." Not only did Arizona blow a late 20-point lead at home in front of a national television audience; the Bears committed *six turnovers* and the Cards still managed to lose. Arizona held Chicago to nine first downs and was *plus-four* in turnovers, yet managed to lose. In the closing seconds, Arizona had last year's Pro Bowl kicker lined up for a 41-yarder to win, and trigger what would surely have been wild civic celebration, and still lost. What's a stronger expression than "pitiful"? We must now twist an old line and proclaim: Whom the football gods would destroy, they first make Arizona Cardinals.

Yet it's not enough to say that mere Cardinal-ness cost Arizona this game. Blowing a late 20-point lead is not easy: Dennis Green and his coaching staff worked hard to blow it. Consider the situation at the start of the fourth quarter. Arizona led 23-10 and had a first-and-10 on its 23. At this point, the clock -- not the Bears -- is the opponent; just keep those numerals on the scoreboard declining and victory is likely. Yet after the first play of the fourth quarter, Arizona **called timeout**. On the possession, Matt Leinart threw incomplete twice, stopping the clock twice more. On its next possession, still leading 23-10 and now with 10:53 remaining, Arizona went run, incompletion, incompletion, stopping the clock two more times before punting. TMQ's Immutable Law of Doing the Obvious holds: Sometimes all a team needs to do is run the ball up the middle for no gain, and everything will be fine. Had Arizona not called a timeout in a clock-killer situation, and had the team simply run up the middle for no gain on these four plays Leinart threw incomplete, probably there never would have been a winning 83-yard Chicago punt return with 2:58 to play. The clock would have expired and the contest would have ended with Arizona leading.

Stadium note: The new Arizona stadium is tremendously impressive, though it makes it a shame the Levitra sponsorship contract with the NFL ended in March. When Levitra, a Viagra competitor, put its billboards in NFL stadia, my line was that while Levitra is intended to increase scoring, it would reduce scoring because the end zone would get farther and farther away during games. Now a stadium exists with a movable field surface -- the end zone actually could get farther away during games. Perfect backdrop for a Levitra ad! That aside, whenever the high-sex-appeal [Cardinals Cheerleaders](#) dance, expect the Arizona field to get a little longer.

In other football news, the MAC rules! This weekend Mid-American Conference starting quarterbacks in the NFL were 3-0 (Bruce Gradkowski, Chad Pennington and Ben Roethlisberger), while starting quarterbacks of the max-glam Pacific-10 went 2-5 (Drew Bledsoe and Jake Plummer winning -- Mark Brunell, Joey Harrington, Damon Huard, Matt Leinart and Carson Palmer losing).

And in other sports news, first the Red Sox win the World Series, then the White Sox win, now the Detroit Tigers are in the World Series. Is it me or does this seem to anyone else a sign of the Apocalypse? Recently scholars working near the Dead Sea unearthed an ancient scroll that warns, "And lo, it shall come to pass that the sox of red will wear the garlands of summer, and then the sox of white, and after that the lowest of the low will be raised high. And verily, this shall happen in a

time of great underground explosions and earthquakes that shake the land itself." Be on the lookout for seven-headed dragons and battalions of armored locust, OK?

**Stat of the Week No. 1:** Chicago became the first team to overcome a 20-point deficit without scoring a touchdown on offense.

**Stat of the Week No. 2:** Denver, at 4-1, has scored only 12 more points than Oakland, at 0-5.

**Stat of the Week No. 3:** At 4:18 p.m. ET on Oct. 15, the Buccaneers, last year's NFC South champion, won their first game of the season.

**Stat of the Week No. 4:** Seattle is 4-1 despite being outscored. In seven quarters, spanning from the end of their game with the Giants to halftime this Sunday, the Seahawks were outscored 85-13.

**Stat of the Week No. 5:** Donovan McNabb and Marc Bulger have combined to throw 23 touchdown passes and three interceptions.

**Stat of the Week No. 6:** Buffalo had a scoring drive of minus-12 yards.

**Stat of the Week No. 7:** Bill Parcells joins Tony Dungy and Mike Shanahan as the only coaches to beat all 32 NFL teams (possible because they beat their present clubs while coaching elsewhere.)

**Stat of the Week No. 8:** Despite no field goals this Sunday, Jeff Wilkins of St. Louis is on a pace to kick 48 field goals; the season record is 40.

**Stat of the Week No. 9:** Buffalo, Cincinnati and Washington lost to teams that entered the weekend a combined 0-14.

**Stat of the Week No. 10:** Since the moment they trotted out to be introduced at Super Bowl XXXVII, the Oakland Raiders are 13-41.

**Cheerleader of the Week:** The spectacularly statuesque [Laura of the Minnesota Vikings](#), whom [two years ago TMQ speculated](#) "must be Amazonian in stature, as she towers over other Viking cheerleaders in their group portrait." Perhaps what's really at work is that others on the squad are pixie-ish. This year Laura's team bio declares, "I am NOT 6 feet tall. I was last measured at 71 inches, so anyone who wants to argue needs to get out their measuring tape!" Hmmm -- roughly 50 million guys would take Laura up on her offer to check her measurements. Also according to her team bio, Laura has a bachelor's in communication from the University of Minnesota, takes [Bosu classes](#) and her "future goals" include a career in marketing. "Future" goals are the only kind -- you can't have retroactive goals!

**Sweet Play of the Week:** Pittsburgh leading 7-0, the Steelers had a first-and-10 on the Chiefs' 47. Pittsburgh ran a sweet-looking play in which Ben Roethlisberger faked the hitch pass right, then faked a handoff up the middle, then threw deep to the unguarded Nate Washington on the skinny post -- touchdown, and the walkover was on. Not only did Kansas City defensive back Greg Wesley let Washington go deep, not even attempting to cover him; not only was Wesley making the high school mistake of "looking into the backfield" trying to guess the play rather than guarding his man; check the tape of what happened once Wesley turned and realized Washington was behind him. Wesley merely stood there and watched the touchdown, jogging a little in the general direction after it was too late. This is the sort of defensive esprit de corps that would later in the game result in Kansas City taking over the mantle of TMQ's Single Worst Play of the Season So Far (see below).

**Sweet Possession of the Week:** Baltimore scored to pull within 23-21 of Carolina with 2:19 remaining -- and holding all three timeouts, the Nevermores decided to kick away. Surely Baltimore's vaunted defense, backed by a crowd roaring at military afterburner decibels, could get the stop! Instead, three snaps by the Cats' offense, a first down, and the rest were kneel-downs.

Note: This contest matched two teams renowned for power rushing. In the game there were 568 yards passing and 138 yards running.

**Sour Play of the Week:** You've got to have some pretty sour plays to blow a 20-point lead at home on "Monday Night Football" with a quarter to play. The sourest for the Cardinals was the one that started their epic collapse. Leading 23-3, Arizona faced second-and-10 on its 15 on the final snap of the third quarter. Matt Leinart dropped back, and Chicago left defensive end Mark Anderson came through the Arizona offensive line untouched by human hands to blindside Leinart, who fumbled, Bears safety Mike Brown recovering for the touchdown. Watch the replay. Arizona right tackle Oliver Ross lines up directly across from Anderson. The right tackle blocks the left end in all offensive schemes known to man. When the quarterback is a lefty as is Leinart, the right tackle is The Man because he guards the quarterback's blindside. Yet on the play Ross makes no attempt to hit Anderson. Ross simply straightens up and watches as Anderson blows through untouched. No quarterback, even for the worst team, expects to be blindsided one second after the snap by a defensive lineman who's never been touched at all. A talk item on the ESPN pregame show for the Monday night game was how terrible the Arizona offensive line is. Yup.

**Sour Sequence of the Week:** Trailing Denver 13-0, Oakland had a second-and-8 deep in Broncos territory early in the third quarter. The Raiders went sack, sack and then settled for the field goal. On the next possession, Oakland had a first-and-10 on its 43. The Raiders went penalty, incompleteness, incompleteness, incompleteness, penalty, punt.

**Sweet 'N' Sour Two-Week Sequence:** Two weeks ago, San Diego honked to the Ravens partly because on a key short-yardage down, the Bolts called a play that had Philip Rivers throw backward to LaDainian Tomlinson running outside, and the play failed. Surely San Francisco would not expect San Diego to use a play that just failed! The Chargers went to the same action on short-yardage again, this time for a touchdown. Two weeks ago that San Diego action was one of TMQ's Sour Plays of the Week, and now it's Sweet.

**Big Gamble That Worked No. 1:** Leading 14-13 over Cincinnati with 18 ticks remaining, Tampa had the Bengals facing a second-and-10 on their 47, still holding two timeouts. The Bucs took a crazy risk by blitzing seven men, and the result was a sack that, for all intent and purpose, sealed the game. Acoustics note: Trailing 13-7 at home and winless on the year, Tampa went for everything on fourth-and-3 from the Cincinnati 8-yard line with 43 seconds remaining, and officials on the field ruled incompleteness. When the replay booth reversed the call and ruled the play a touchdown, the pirate-themed stadium shook so loudly my laptop rattled.

**Big Gamble That Worked No. 2:** Trailing St. Louis 28-27, the Blue Men Group reached first-and-10 on the Rams' 32 with 17 seconds remaining. Their coaches gambled by sending Mack Strong up the middle, assuming the field goal was already within reach. Then Matt Hasselbeck spiked the ball to stop the clock, and on the disorganized play Seattle was called for not being properly lined up, moving the spot back to the St. Louis 36-yard line with four seconds to go. Had the call been a false start, 10 seconds would have run off the clock and the game would have ended. The replay showed both illegal formation and false start, but it was illegal formation the zebras called, and that penalty



They're down on their knees and begging the football gods in San Francisco, and it's still not enough.

does not include a 10-second runoff. From the 36, Josh Brown hit a 54-yard field goal to win. Note about an ending more exciting than Seahawks fans would have cared for: With three minutes remaining, Seattle led 27-21 and had a third-and-4 on Les Mouflons' 11, St. Louis down to one timeout. Maurice Morris ran and crossed the first down marker; had he simply dropped to his knees, the game would have, for all intent and purpose, been over. But Morris tried to churn for an extra yard and fumbled. A moment later, Marc Bulger threw that highlight-reel 67-yard touchdown to Torry Holt, and the sweaty-palms finish was set in motion.

**Medium-Sized Gamble That Worked:** Game tied at 24, the United States Saints reached first-and-goal on the Philadelphia 9-yard at the two-minute warning, holding one timeout. Thrice Drew Brees knelt on the ball, then John Carney kicked the winning 31-yard field goal with three ticks remaining. Doing it this way precluded the chance of a fumble or that New Orleans would score a touchdown quickly, leaving the Eagles time. But field goals are hardly automatic. Had Carney missed, everyone in the sports-yak universe would today be second-guessing not trying for the touchdown here. Note to ESPN fact-checking department: Please verify that the Saints are actually 5-1.

**At Least Since Congress Was Not in Session, the Citizens Were Safe:** Many TV news channels now flash glaring bright-red bars across the bottom of the screen, even if the story being reported concerns sorghum subsidy payments. Bright red is thought to command attention. News channels also now commonly flash **BREAKING NEWS** even when the "breaking news" is a government press conference at which some robotic figure issues denials, or a similar non-event. And news channels now commonly project a picture-in-picture of a live view of something, since live is more compelling than taped. Last week I was watching Fox News, and as the Dennis Hastert scandal was being discussed, the screen showed the Capitol Dome above the legend, **LIVE VIEW OF U.S. CAPITOL**. Not only was it just a live view of the walls of a building, Congress was not in session at the time.

**Stop Me Before I Blitz Again!** Early in the Flaming Thumbtacks-at-Redskins contest, Washington called a big blitz on a Tennessee third down, and caught Vince Young for the sack. Now Washington leads 14-13 in the third quarter, Tennessee faces a third down. and again six blitzers cross the line; perfect "hot read" pass for 27 yards to Drew Bennett. Three snaps later, Tennessee faces a fourth-and-2 on the home team 31 and Jeff Fisher makes the right Maroon Zone decision -- rather than launch an unlikely long field goal, he tries for the statistically likely first down. Again Washington's defensive coordinator, the tastefully named Gregg Williams, sends the big blitz and again Young makes the "hot read," tossing 23 yards to the man-covered Brandon Jones. Tennessee scores on the possession to take the lead and never looks back.



The NCAA has demanded the Indian feathers be removed from "Freedom," the statue at the top of the Capitol dome.

Nation's capital note: The Redskins honked despite a pregame flyover by the Thunderbirds, who were in town for the dedication of the [Air Force Memorial](#). But then perhaps it is best we do not discuss the Redskins and the concept of air power in the same paragraph!

Draft note: Houston had the first choice and picked defensive end Mario Williams over the electric Reggie Bush and hometown hero Vince Young. Bush has been fabulous and Young, on Sunday making just his third start, gives the early impression of a force to be reckoned with. The Houston defense? Last in the league.

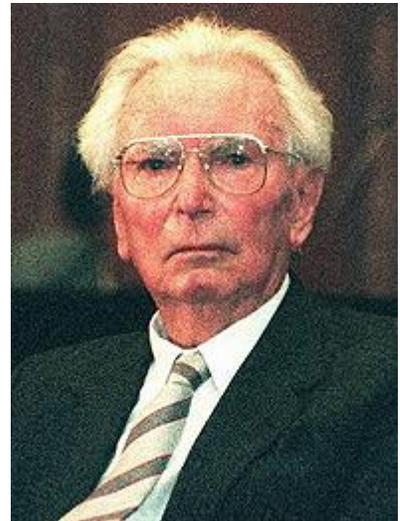
**T.O. Recommended Reading List:** Terrell Owens asked outside the Cowboys' locker room, "Why am I here?" T.O., I advise that you read:

- "Man's Search for Meaning" by Viktor Frankl
- "The Once and Future King" by T.H. White
- "My Antonia" by Willa Cather
- "Huckleberry Finn" by Samuel Clemens
- "The Pursuit of Happiness" by David Myers
- "I and Thou" by Martin Buber
- "Invisible Man" by Ralph Ellison
- "Things Fall Apart" by Chinua Achebe
- "Death Comes for the Archbishop" by Cather
- "The Human Race" by Robert Antelme
- "God in the Dock" by C.S. Lewis
- "Omnipotence and Other Theological Mistakes" by Charles Hartshorne
- "The Ghost Road" by Patricia Barker
- "Our Town" by Thornton Wilder
- "The House of Breath" by William Goyen



Hey Mark Brunell, they're open! They're open!

These books have enriched my understanding of the question, "Why am I here?" "The House of Breath" is especially recommended, as it is one of the most humane and emotional novels of the past century, yet barely known. I will commend two more books, much lower in quality than the great works listed above, but nonetheless worth reading: "Beside Still Waters" by Gregg Easterbrook and "The Purpose-Driven Life" by Rick Warren. Though I disagree with some of Warren's theology -- I don't believe there is any divine plan for individual lives, God is watching events unfold just as we are -- "The Purpose-Driven Life" has helped many people find a sense of meaning and the strength to live virtuously. Warren is a lot easier to follow than Buber, and there is merit in arguments for human kindness that anyone can grasp. And as for my own contribution to the literature on this question, I hope you'll read it.



Viktor Frankl's book has a lot to teach T.O.

**This Fulfills My Obligation to Say Something About the Dallas at Houston Game:** The contest was played before an announced crowd of 63,186.

**Early "Game Over":** Pittsburgh leading 21-0 early in the second quarter, backup running back Najeh Davenport went 48 yards up the gut of the Kansas City defense, and TMQ wrote the words "game over" in his notebook.

**Best Purist Comeback:** Jersey/A trailed 14-3 in the third quarter at Atlanta, having just watched Warrick Dunn sprint 90 yards for a touchdown. The Georgia Dome crowd was dancin' in the seats. Rather than panic -- TMQ's Law of Football Panic is, "Don't panic yet, there will be plenty of time for that later" -- the Giants staged a nine-play, 84-yard touchdown drive that included numerous rushing plays. Then the Jersey/A defense held Atlanta to a three-and-out. The Giants staged an 11-play, 91-yard drive that included numerous rushing plays. The Jersey/A defense held Atlanta to a three-and-out. Then the Giants staged a six-play field goal drive, then held the Falcons to a three-and-out, then the Giants staged an eight-play touchdown drive on which six plays were rushes, making it 27-14. The rest was Atlanta panic.

During this comeback there were no big turnovers or flashy Jersey/A play, just work, work, work on both sides of the ball. TMQ contends that unless it's the fourth quarter, a team that is behind, even way behind, should not go pass-wacky. When you're behind what you need is a scoring drive. Call anything in the playbook, even time-consuming rushing plays. Just get a score, and then see what the world looks like. Congratulations, Jersey/A, on not panicking.

**Semi-Official News Agency Releases Semi-Truth Expressed in Semi-Grammar:** Worried about North Korea having the atomic bomb? You'll feel better after checking the [Korean Central News Agency](#), mouthpiece of the Pyongyang government. Several recent press releases celebrated the recent 80th anniversary of the Down-With-Imperialism Union. Oddly, North Korean government announcements may be read in Korean, English -- or Spanish. Many announcements concern the presentation of ceremonial gifts, flowers and letters of commendation. For example:

*Pyongyang, July 11 (KCNA) -- Cambodian King Norodom Sihamoni sent a large floral basket to the DPRK embassy in Phnom Penh on the occasion of the 12th anniversary of demise of President Kim Il Sung. Written on the ribbon of the floral basket were letters reading, "Highest tribute to HE Generalissimo Kim Il Sung, president of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. Norodom Sihamoni, King of Cambodia." The deputy prime minister hoped that Kim Il Sung would always live in the hearts of the Korean people.*

Or consider this North Korean statement, headlined JAPAN'S SERVILITY TO THE U.S. RIDICULED.

*Pyongyang, July 3 (KCNA) -- GI criminals are accorded such "special treatment" in prisons by Japan that they are given chances to have showers everyday, meat is served to them as part of their meals and cakes, coffee and milk are offered to them between meals, according to information released by the Japanese government recently. Commenting on this, Rodong Sinmun Monday observes: This is touching off due resentment among Japanese including families of those who fell victim to the GI crimes. Such "generous treatment" accorded by Japan to the U.S. criminals there is not regarded as something surprising or strange but as quite a natural and common practice in that country as it is steeped in flattery and subservience to the U.S., its master, to the marrow of its bones.*

Bear in mind that in North Korea, to take a shower or have a meal that includes meat represent exotic special privileges reserved for the party elite. Below is the North Korean government's announcement to the world of its atomic test:

*Pyongyang, October 9 (KCNA) -- The field of scientific research in the DPRK successfully conducted an underground nuclear test under secure conditions on October 9, Juche 95 (2006) at a stirring time when all the people of the country are making a great leap forward in the building of a great prosperous powerful socialist nation. The nuclear test was conducted with indigenous wisdom and technology 100 percent. It marks a historic event as it greatly encouraged and pleased the KPA and people that have wished to have powerful self-reliant defense capability. It will contribute to defending the peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula and in the area around it.*

**We're All Professionals Here:** Buffalo had a second-and-2; the Bills allowed sacks on consecutive plays and ended up punting on fourth-and-21.

**Perhaps Shedding Light on Why These Teams Are a Combined 3-9:** Buffalo punted to Detroit on fourth-and-1, and the Lions punted back on fourth-and-1.



The NCAA once sanctioned Kim Il Sung for using the tomahawk chop to threaten South Korea.

**When I Was a Kid, I Actually Did Walk Through Snow to Deliver Newspapers:**

This week the venerable Buffalo News, last major newspaper in the United States offering afternoon delivery, converts to morning-only. For 126 years, the Buffalo News has arrived on subscribers' doorsteps at 4 p.m.; now the time will be 6 a.m. The transition of newspaper sales from afternoon to morning tells more about changing American sociology than about the news business. As recently as two generations ago, most Americans had blue-collar employment that involved shifts beginning at 7 a.m. and ending at 3 p.m. Workers would depart for the factory in predawn darkness and return, exhausted, in late afternoon: to put your feet up with the afternoon paper before dinner was not only a way to stay informed but one of life's small pleasures. Today less than a fifth of the United States workforce has blue-collar employment, while more than half work in office settings. That today the *typical* American is white-collar, rather than being engaged in backbreaking manual toil, stands among the great achievements of the postwar era, and is insufficiently remarked upon. But for the newspaper business, this makes morning delivery a must. White-collar employees don't arrive at work till 8 or later, thus having time to read the paper over coffee; they need to know the morning's news, to sound informed at the office; they stagger home late having stared at screens and documents all day, in no mood then to read.

As a boy growing up in Buffalo, I rose before dawn daily to deliver the old Courier Express, the Buff News' morning competitor, which folded in 1982. Walking my paper route I kept a transistor radio in my pocket in hopes of hearing the sports scores. The Courier Express "went to bed," or finalized its content, before midnight, so often the night sports scores were not in the morning paper. There being no Web or ESPN, teenagers and sports-nuts went through the day wondering who had won the previous night's games, and did not find out until the News began thumping on doorsteps in the afternoon. There was a civilized feeling to an afternoon newspaper, as if the butler would bring it round with your correspondence and a glass of sherry. Now Instant Messaging means there are no letters for the butler to bring, while the speeding-up of everything mandates we get our news immediately upon waking. Consider that even in Buffalo, today the majority of newspaper customers live on the white-collar clock. TMQ salutes the last afternoon daily to succumb.



A typical summer day in Buffalo.

**Mile-High Mystery:** Denver is playing fabulous defense, allowing just 37 points in five games. The Broncos are also playing terrible offense, scoring just 62 points. Football lore says defense trumps offense, so presumably this foretells a big season for the orange horsies. But Denver's lame offense is particularly puzzling given that the team's great defense keeps getting the ball back in good field position. On Sunday night, Denver coughed and clanked to score 13 points at home against the league's worst team.

**Tis Better to Have Rushed and Lost Than Never to Have**

**Rushed At All:** Start of the fourth quarter in Atlanta, the Falcons had lost a seemingly solid lead, but still trailed the Giants only 17-14 with a stanza remaining. Atlanta faced third-and-2 on its 32. The Falcons have by far the league's best rushing attack, averaging 232 yards per game and a twinkling-bright 6.4 yards per run. Atlanta also has the league's 27th-rated passer in Michael Vick and 32nd-rated overall passing attack. So why not just run the ball? Sack, then the punt shanks and a few plays later Atlanta trails 20-14. On the next possession, taking over with 11:04 remaining and loads of time to grind down the field for the go-ahead touchdown, Atlanta coaches went pass-wacky. Result: sack, scramble, punt. From the point at which the No. 1 rushing team in the NFL took an 11-point second-half lead, Atlanta coaches called 19 passing plays and four rushes. Ye gods.

**Republicans, Democrats Accuse Each Other of Partisanship:** Perhaps the most tedious aspect of politics is wrangling over credit or blame. First, since government usually can only influence events, not control them, rare is the case where Democrats or Republicans are clearly to blame or deserve full credit for anything. Second, all that matters to citizens is whether things go well, not who signed which piece of paper on what day. Here are three examples. It is absurd for Republicans to keep saying Bill Clinton is to blame for not killing Osama bin Laden in 1998. Republicans were in control of the White House from January to September 2001, and they didn't do anything decisive about bin Laden either. It was absurd for Sen. John McCain last week to say that Clinton's 1994 agreement with North Korea is the reason that nation (perhaps) developed an atomic weapon. Republicans have now held the White House for as long as Clinton administered his North Korea deal, and Republicans did not stop North Korea either. And last week when new low-polluting "reformulated" diesel fuel hit the market, it was absurd that Democrats claimed George W. Bush deserves no credit because the initial rule mandating the advance was signed by Clinton a few days before he left office.



Cheerleader professionalism helped Denver overcome Oakland -- but probably wasn't necessary.

On the diesel fuel advance, which will cut air pollution, Bush could have stopped the rule but instead supported it -- over the howls of the petroleum industry, which refines diesel. Anti-pollution regulations typically allow industry five to seven years to design and manufacture the technology needed to reduce emissions. Owing to this lag it is common for one president to put into practice a regulation first proposed by his predecessor; Bush's father signed the 1991 legislation mandating a reduction in acid rain, then Clinton actually carried out that reform. All that matters is whether the public benefits, and the new low-polluting diesel fuel, for which Clinton and George W. Bush ought to share credit, will lead to a big reduction in smog, plus a reduction in asthma incidence. Note that the country's most important news organization, the New York Times, buried the arrival of polluting-reducing diesel fuel on page A22, since it is inconveniently positive news.



"And if elected, I promise to blame the other party."

Clinton addendum: The recent fictionalized TV docudrama about the buildup to Sept. 11 ominously suggests Clinton's State Department sabotaged the 1998 missile strike against al-Qaida in Afghanistan by warning Pakistan that our missiles were about to cross its airspace on their way somewhere else. Bin Laden fled his Afghan camp while the missiles were in the air, and it's likely bad people in the Pak government tipped him off. But the revisionism skips *why* we warned Islamabad missiles were coming. Weeks before the strike, Pakistan had tested its first atomic bomb; Pakistan and India were on the verge of history's first atomic war. If unknown missiles approaching Pakistan had triggered an atomic exchange, this would have been a moral horror. The Clinton Administration absolutely had to warn Pakistan, risking a tip-off: Any other course would have been immoral. The real question about the 1998 strike was why missiles were fired across Pakistan (from a submarine in the Arabian Sea) in the first place. Missiles could have been fired from the Persian Gulf across Iran into Afghanistan. Cruise missiles are hard to detect; Iran in 1998 was not on high alert as Pakistan was; and Shia Iran doesn't much like Sunni al-Qaida. Thus flight across Iran might have avoided the tip-off.

Revisionism addendum: Suppose Clinton had, in 1998, ordered an invasion of Afghanistan to destroy al-Qaida and Taliban forces there, as the docudrama suggested Clinton should have. Surely the president would have been bitterly denounced by Republicans, and since Sept. 11 would never have happened, today the 1998 invasion of Afghanistan would be spoken of as a pointless fiasco of the highest order. Something to chew on when you think about the Iraq war.

**Maybe Flying Should Be Hard:** The light plane belonging to Yankee pitcher Cory Lidle that crashed into a Manhattan apartment building, killing him and his flight instructor, was a [Cirrus SR20](#). Development of this plane was chronicled in the 2001 book [Free Flight](#) by TMQ's pal James Fallows. The goal of the Cirrus project was to make individual air travel more practical by creating a relatively low-cost plane that is much easier to fly than previous aircraft, and that has a safety feature no plane has ever had -- if you get into bad trouble, you pull a lever and a [giant parachute unfurls](#), floating the machine to the ground. Whatever went wrong aboard Lidle's Cirrus appears to have happened so fast, there wasn't time to pull the lever; and the aircraft was so low the chute probably would not have helped. At any rate, this raises a number of questions about the relationship between safety engineering and vehicle use.

Media accounts since the Lidle crash have noted that on nine occasions Cirrus pilots have pulled the chute lever, saving 21 lives. But the device is no panacea, as there have also been four fatal Cirrus crashes in 2006. Air crashes are so rare that the occurrence of a fatal Cirrus crash hardly means people should stop flying the plane: if someone slammed an SUV into a Manhattan apartment building, killing four, no one would hesitate for a moment to hop into an SUV and drive away after hearing the news. But some aviators quietly question whether the Cirrus parachute is actually a good idea. They wonder if it creates an illusion of total safety that makes Cirrus pilots cavalier about their training hours and flying choices. That safety devices might cause cavalier driving has been noted in cars -- more in a moment. And the Cirrus crashes call into question the No. 1 trend in the general aviation industry, the advent of semi-automated small planes that are designed to be much easier to fly than previous aircraft. The Cirrus, which costs \$250,000 to \$350,000, and two new "very light jets" called the Adam and the Eclipse, which cost \$1.8 million to \$2.3 million, are runaway hits in the aviation market. The well-to-do and new air-taxi services are buying these planes like crazy, partly on the theory that they do not require high proficiency of pilot skill, and can make practical extremely convenient point-to-point air travel. That extremely convenient point-to-point air travel will become affordable on semi-automated or even fully automated small planes is the thesis of "Free Flight," a book that should be of renewed interest in light of the Lidle crash. But will it necessarily be smart to fill the air with large numbers of planes that novice pilots believe are "easy" to fly? Maybe not.



Can safety devices be dangerous?

Death rates per mile of automobile travel have been in mild decline for decades, so as regards cars and SUVs, the picture is mainly good. But the safety engineering of modern passenger vehicles is so much better than a generation ago -- antilock brakes, air bags, electronic brake management, improved handling power and impact-absorbing chassis design -- that perhaps road fatalities should have declined even more. Researchers including [Fred Mannering of Purdue University](#) have [proposed](#) that airbags and antilock brakes cause no net improvement in highway safety because they encourage aggressive driving. Faster, less vigilant driving roughly offsets safety improvements, leaving the net about the same as it would be without the safety engineering, Mannering believes.

A false sense of invincibility especially backfires as regards the SUV. Many owners of SUVs drive like lunatics, perhaps because they believe the SUVs make them invincible. Studies by Ted Gayer of Georgetown University have shown you are more likely to die as the driver or passenger of an SUV than if in a regular car. Be sure to [see this study](#) by Michelle White of the University of California San Diego, published in the *Journal of Law and Economics*, which shows the backfire effect of Americans buying ever-larger SUVs and pickup trucks in the false belief that size confers safety. For each one million SUVs or pickup trucks that replace regular cars, White found, from 34 to 93 additional highway deaths occur. Eerily, White further found that "for each fatal crash that occupants of large vehicles avoid, at least 4.3 fatal crashes involving others occur." That is to say, the apparent protective qualities of big vehicles actually cause more people to die. Mannerling has a point about careless driving, but my guess is that the trend toward SUVs and pickup trucks driven as cars explains why highway fatalities have not declined as much as they should.



Nascar race or typical suburban boulevard scene?

Advanced safety features on vehicles might even be a root cause of the road rage that has been afflicting American boulevards in the past decade. Road rage seemed to begin roughly corresponding to the arrival of antilock brakes and universal air bags. Drivers falsely assume these high-tech features make them invincible, and so gun the engine, cut each other off and race to beat stoplights. It's impossible to oppose safety engineering, of course. But we must bear in mind that safety features can lead to carelessness on the part of drivers or pilots.

Jim Fallows note: His brilliant new book ["Blind into Baghdad"](#) is the most important thing anyone has written about the Iraq War. Read it.

**More On Briscoe High:** Of Nike's high school football commercial, reader Jim Speese of Reading, Pa., writes, "You argued no coach would call a halfback option on the last play of the game from midfield, because the defense would never bite on the run in that situation. But Don Shula recognizes that LaDainian Tomlinson throws a better ball than Michael Vick. Putting the final pass in LT/2's hands gives the team a better chance of victory." TMQ also declared himself puzzled that the Briscoe High spot uses "Spirit in the Sky" as its music track. Yes this is a catchy tune, and yes it is heard in football movies, prominently in "Remember the Titans." But the song is, after all, about dying and meeting Jesus! Note that Nike manipulated the track so you hear its many references to dying but never hear the name Jesus. ([Play the commercial here](#); the [song lyrics are here](#).) That a big corporation thinks it's fine to subliminally associate military-age young men with glory in death, but not fine to associate them with history's most important pacifist, creeps me out. Anyway comes now reader Mary Beth Calorama of Venice, Calif., to report Norman Greenbaum was not, as everyone thinks, a one-hit wonder. He was a two-hit wonder: under the name Dr. West's Medicine Show, Greenbaum recorded the cult hit "The Eggplant that Ate Chicago," one of TMQ's all-time favorite songs.



Would you want L.T. throwing the ball, or Michael Vick?

**Single Worst Play of the Season So Far:** Relax, San Francisco, previous holder of this distinction: It is now held by Kansas City. Leading 21-0 in the first half, Pittsburgh had second-and-6 on the Chiefs' 13. The Steelers lined up with a tight end, fullback and receiver Hines Ward bunched tight right. At the snap, the tight end ran an out into the flat, the fullback ran an "arrow" route into the flat behind the tight end, and Ward ran straight up the field and turned around. Kansas City's defense did not react in any way to Ward, simply leaving alone the opponent's most dangerous weapon: Touchdown. Rookie safety Jarrad Page made the wrong decision, double-teaming another Steeler, while the boastful Ty Law, the corner on that side, stood like a topiary covering no one at all. Middle linebacker Kawika Mitchell also was near Ward and decided his time was best spent covering no one. Three guys available and none of them reacted to the opposition's best threat: The Single Worst Play of the Season So Far.

**Miami Dolphins Sack-O-Meter:** The Dolphins surrendered no sacks at Jersey/B -- but three turnovers versus none for your opponent will pretty much do it to you. The serious pun potential Mike Mularkey ran a dreadful offense in Buffalo for two seasons: dull playcalling, poor offensive line performance, erratic quarterbacking plus a megabucks running back struggling to seem average. Now Mularkey is running the Miami offense, and does anything sound familiar? Meanwhile with Drew Brees playing fabulous and Daunte Culpepper benched, Miami's offseason looks ever-worse. Brees was eager to join the Dolphins as a free agent; Nick Saban decided he'd rather give up a second-round draft pick to trade for Culpepper. If you had to choose now, what would you say was the worst management decision of the offseason: Mario Williams over Bush or Young, or Culpepper plus a second-round choice over Brees?

**This Week's High School Item:** A couple years ago I touted James Collins, a gifted coach who took over the program at my kids' high school, which hadn't had a winning season in a decade, and by his second year reached round two of the state playoffs. My kids' high school is struggling this season, so let me redirect your attention to a graduate of Collins' coaching staff, a former Arena League (and briefly NFL) player named Gunnard Twyner. He was Collins' offensive coordinator, then in the offseason became head coach at Kennedy High School of Silver Spring, Md. Kennedy long has been a troubled school owing to academic problems plus complex racial politics; and on the much less important topic of football, its football teams were just dreadful. When Twyner was hired, Kennedy had lost 26 consecutive games. School spirit was so low only a handful of guys came out for tryouts in the August heat. Home games were staged in eerie silence before a few dozen morose immediate relatives of players. Last season, Kennedy was outscored 368-43.

Obviously, I'm telling you all this because there has been a remarkable turnaround. Just in his first season, Twyner has Kennedy at 5-1 and the talk of Maryland prep football. Smart and charismatic, somehow Twyner reversed the defeatist attitude of the school and made this summer's football tryouts an A-list event. He promised a deep-strike Rams-style attack to provide entertainment to spectators. Kennedy just played its homecoming before a raucous chanting crowd that would make any Texas high school football star feel at home. Twyner even managed to win a game 55-8 without running up the score -- it was 47-0 at the half and then he sat the starters. Remember the name "Gunnard Twyner" because in a few years you'll read it in your sports section when he is hired by a big-college program.

**Generic Prediction Update:** As the season began, [I made the off-price private-label forecast](#), "Home Team 20, Visiting Team 17 will in 2006 happen more than any other outcome." I urged those who engage in quixotic quests to predict exact NFL final scores never to think about matchups, field conditions, injury lists or mojo, simply endlessly predict Home Team 20, Visiting Team 17. My system has the benefit that you don't need to possess incredible insider information, or

even know who's playing. On Sunday, Home Team 20, Visiting Team 17 happened twice -- in the Miami at Jersey/B and Buffalo at Detroit contests. It's only Week 6 and already I have predicted two exact NFL final scores. Has any full-time professional sports pundit come close to that?

**Obscure College Score of the Week No. 1:** California of Pennsylvania 24, Slippery Rock 14. The buildup continues for TMQ's annual Obscure College Game of the Year -- Indiana of Pennsylvania versus California of Pennsylvania at Hepner-Bailey Field at Adamson Stadium in California, Pa. on Nov. 11. California of Pennsylvania University [offers courses online](#), so you don't actually have to be in either California or Pennsylvania. TMQ is suspicious of the online university movement, which seems to me more marketing gimmick than actual education. The online University of Phoenix, which just bought the naming rights to the place that should have been named Pat Tillman Field, is profitable but borders on diploma mill -- you pay a fee to call yourself graduate of the "university," [without ever setting foot on a campus](#). But if marketing organizations using serious-sounding names like University of Phoenix are going to sell diplomas online, it seems only a matter of time until real universities do the same. California of Pennsylvania is at the forefront.

**Obscure College Score of the Week No. 2:** Brevard 10, Chowan 5. The Hawks' faithful lament -- if only we'd gotten three more safeties. Located in Murfreesboro, N.C., [Chowan University's dining hall](#) "is committed to providing a wide variety of healthy choices for our students" yet offers pizza and french fries at all meals.

**Reader Animadversion:** Got a complaint or a deeply held grievance? Write me at [TMQ\\_ESPN@yahoo.com](mailto:TMQ_ESPN@yahoo.com). Include your real name and the name of your hometown, and I might quote you by name unless you instruct me otherwise. Note: Giving your hometown improves your odds of being quoted.

**Next Week:** Terrell Owens stands in the Cowboys' locker room and asks aloud, "Why did chance distribution of natural resources and geographical advantages impact cultural evolution so profoundly?"

**Monday, October 23, 2006**

**Updated: October 24, 3:12 PM ET**

The high school offense works!

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By Gregg Easterbrook

So Michael Vick really can throw -- maybe Nike should film the Briscoe High commercial again and let Vick attempt the final pass! Don't be deceived by Vick's four-touchdown-pass performance, Atlanta's success starts with rushing. On Sunday, the Falcons ran for 173 yards despite facing an overstacked defense. Pittsburgh stacked the line to stop the run, and Vick play-faked and rolled out for his throws. Atlanta leads the NFL in rushing by a runaway margin: 222 yards rushing per game, plus a diamond-sparkling 6.1 yards per rush attempt. Which leads us to the question of why is Atlanta's running game so good? And the answer is not what you're thinking.

Maybe you think the Falcons rush so well because their offensive line uses the [Alex Gibbs](#) theory of cut-blocking. In the Gibbs' scheme, offensive linemen move laterally more than driving straight ahead, and seemingly attempt to injure defenders by diving at their knees. Injury attempts usually fail, but because the front seven is preoccupied with protecting its knees, the defense does not perform as well as it otherwise would, opening up running lanes. This cut-blocking philosophy is indeed an ingredient in the running success of the two teams that feature it, Denver and Atlanta. But it is not the key to the Falcons' ground game, especially since the league in recent years has reviewed film of offensive line play by Denver and Atlanta and warned these teams about attempt-to-injure tactics.

Maybe you think Atlanta rushes so well because Vick's running ability adds a dimension no other NFL team has. That's surely a factor -- Vick is genuinely fast. But he's hardly the first quarterback who can run (think Fran Tarkenton) or the first who is really fast (think Steve Young). The real reason the Falcons are chewing up the National Football League on the ground is that they are the first team in recent memory to have the sheer brass to use a high school offense.

Some high school teams run almost all the time, but that strategy breaks down against a sophisticated opponent. A few high school teams attempt pass-oriented attacks. But at the prep level, constant passing works only for schools with a combination of superior athletes and the ability to have the entire team together six hours a day in July for a boatload of illegal practices. The basis of most successful high school offenses is a run focus with a quarterback who is himself a running threat; you run, run, run and then use the play action and pass deep. I've heard people complain that high school offenses are too conventional because so many are run, run, run then play-fake and throw deep. There's a reason so many high schools do this -- it works! And now the Atlanta Falcons have brought this philosophy to the NFL.

Sure, every pro football team wants to run, and every team uses the play-action. But the NFL in the last decade has become a short-pass-oriented league. Teams that keep running until they draw the defense to the line, then play-fake and throw deep, are rare. Indianapolis is one -- despite the Colts' pass-wacky image, so far they have run 173 times and passed 131 times. Atlanta is using the high school approach to a fare-thee-well. The Falcons have rushed 219 times this season and passed 148 times. On Sunday, when Pittsburgh crowded the line to stop the run, Vick play-faked and threw deep.

What makes the Atlanta offense more high-school-ish is the rollout emphasis. Effective high school offenses have far more rollout passes than pocket passes. Somehow the idea has arisen among pro

coaches that only dropback passes are "real" passes and only yards gained with dropback passing, not yards on quarterback scrambles, help. Rollouts confuse defenses, while simplifying the view for the quarterback, who only has to look at half the field. Long scrambles absolutely break the backs of defenses. The Colts' offense is only semi-high-school because Peyton Manning is almost always in the pocket and almost never pulls it down to run. Vick this season has mostly been rolling out, which helps his read -- he only has to look at about half the gridiron, not scan the whole gridiron and wonder where to throw -- and gives him a better running option since he can get to the sideline and avoid taking a big hit. Since Michael Vick came into the league, his coaches have experimented with having him throw dropback deep passes; having him do loads of designed runs; having him attempt the West Coast short-crossing-route attack; and now they're simply letting him operate a classic high school offense. And just like in high school, it works!

The Falcons run, run, run and then when the defense comes up, they play-fake and throw deep -- and they do it while rolling out. The moment when the opponent has run on five straight snaps, then the quarterback play-fakes and sprints in the opposite direction, is the one every high school coach dreads. This action is so popular in high school because it is so effective, yet is not used that much in the pros. Denver is the only other club in recent years to go high school on a regular basis; last season the Broncos' offense, although it did pass the ball more than it ran the ball, had a lot of run, run, run and then Jake Plummer play-fakes and sprints out the opposite way. (Because Denver is sputtering on offense this season, it's hard to assess what the plan is supposed to be.) NFL teams -- you've tried power-rush, single-back, run-and-shoot, no-huddle, five-wide. Now it's time to try high school! And yes, a quarterback as fast as Vick helps, but as anyone who watches high school football knows, the run-run-run then play-fake and rollout offense can make almost any quarterback look good. So why don't more NFL teams do it? Maybe it's vainglory. Offensive coordinators want people to think they are engaged in super-complex mystical planning that only insiders can grasp. They don't want to borrow tactics from high school, even if those tactics work.

In other football news, reader Hugh Gurney of Bournemouth, England, notes that you already can vote for [the Pro Bowl](#). Less than half of the season has been played! "Just like I started to find Christmas gifts stocked in my local supermarket in August, Pro Bowl voting seems to come earlier every year," Gurney writes. Bad enough that Pro Bowl voting closes after Week 15, with two games left to play, rendering performance in those contests irrelevant. Tuesday Morning Quarterback calls the Hawaii contingent the Eighty-Eight Percent All-Pros as a result. Allowing fans to vote so early confirms the complaint that the Pro Bowl is a popularity contest, not an honor for the best performers. Hey NFL, it's October. Nobody could possibly make a reasonable Pro Bowl judgment already.

And in other football news, "Friday Night Lights" has revealed itself to be a fantastic television show. For my suggestion to save it, see below.

**Stat of the Week No. 1:** Denver, at 5-1, has scored seven more points than Oakland, at 1-5.

**Stat of the Week No. 2:** Since taking a 20-point lead over undefeated Chicago, Arizona has been outscored 46-12.

**Stat of the Week No. 3:** Jacksonville is 4-5 all-time against Houston.

**Stat of the Week No. 4:** Brett Favre threw two passes on the same play. (A deflected pass bounced back to him.)

**Stat of the Week No. 5:** Dick Jauron is on pace to finish with one winning season in seven as a head coach.

**Stat of the Week No. 6:** As noted by reader Emanuele Fadini of Turin, Italy, the Cardinals had 11 takeaways in the last two games and lost both.

**Stat of the Week No. 7:** From 4:29 to 4:48 p.m. ET, Atlanta had four field goal attempts to win against Pittsburgh.

**Stat of the Week No. 8:** Bill Belichick is 13-1 against Buffalo.

**Stat of the Week No. 9:** Owing to multiple penalties, Washington kicked off from its 5-yard line.

**Stat of the Week No. 10:** Drew Bledsoe was lifted for throwing an interception. On his first snap, backup Tony Romo threw an interception.

**Cheerleader of the Week:** Tom Bacon of Manhattan Beach, Calif., nominates from the medium-hot San Diego Chargers the [red-hot Michelle](#), whose favorite charity is [Make Trade Fair](#). This offshoot of Oxfam International lobbies for reasonable payments to developing-world farmers and tradespeople. According to her team bio, Michelle says "I support anything that helps third-world countries." You don't bump into cheer-babes concerned with developing world economic issues every day! One of the big causes for fair-trade advocates has been ending tariffs that penalize developing-world nations importing textiles to the West. Though even with totally equitable textile rules, developing nations would not sell much in the way of textiles for the two-ounces-of-fabric swimsuits worn on the [Charger Girls calendar](#).

**From Hero to Zero to Romo:** Sure you just gave up your body on a dramatic dive for a touchdown, but Drew Bledsoe, what have you done for us lately? With 3:56 remaining in the second quarter and the Cowboys at the Jersey/A goal line, Bledsoe scrambled, dove and took hammer-hard hits as he scored the touchdown that pulled the home team to within 12-7. The crowd cheered. Just five snaps later, with 1:38 left in the second quarter, Dallas was again at the Jersey/A goal line and Bledsoe threw an interception. The crowd booed, and Bledsoe was yanked from the game. Dallas fans roared their approval as Tony Romo entered -- except he threw an interception on his first snap. Romo ended up tossing three interceptions in the second half, one when Dallas was yet again at the Giants' goal line.

So both Dallas quarterbacks ended the game in the doghouse, and TMQ thinks bad coaching is the explanation. Early in the contest, G-Persons leading 7-0, Dallas had a first-and-10 on its own 1-yard line, the most dangerous spot on the field. Dallas' coaches called for Bledsoe to take a five-step drop backward into his end zone; he barely avoided a safety. Now it's second down, and what do Dallas' coaches call? Another dropback: sack, safety. The Cowboys' offensive line messed up on this play - - LaVar Arrington came through the "B gap" untouched, the right tackle and right guard both ignoring him. But the key mistake was the coaches' calls, not the players' performance.

Now we're at the Giants' goal line with 1:38 left in the first half. It's second-and-goal, Dallas holds all three timeouts, plenty of time to run the ball. Instead, the Cowboys' coaches call a short square-out. When you're at the goal line, the short square-out is the riskiest play you can call. Defenders are up at the line, so the cornerback is in position to break on the ball and intercept it; and in this situation the pass travels almost entirely sideways, giving the corner time to react. Dallas' coaches should know how risky the short square-out at the goal line is because three weeks ago when the Cowboys were at the Philadelphia goal line in the closing minute, game in the balance, Dallas' coaches called a short square-out that was intercepted and returned for a touchdown. Maybe, just maybe, the Giants watched film of that. So what do Dallas' coaches tell Bledsoe to throw? A short square-out, interception. Just to prove it was no fluke, when the Cowboys reached Jersey/A's 11 late in a game that was still contested, Dallas' coaches again called a short square-out, again intercepted,

and this time it was returned for the icing touchdown. Afterward, did Bill "Mr. Personality" Parcells blame himself or his staff? Somehow he didn't get around to that.

Three Dallas notes: First, it's long been clear that Parcells is an egomaniac in both the casual and, perhaps, clinical senses of that word. Lately he's gone downhill to simply becoming a nasty person, spitting and snarling at everyone around him. What's Parcells going to do next, demand worship? When I look at Parcells, the phrase that comes to mind is "failed human being." Second, the deciding play of Monday night's game was a Terrell Owens blunder. Trailing 19-7 midway through the third quarter, Dallas had a fourth-and-2 on the Jersey/A 32. Romo put a perfect short pass into Owens' hands, and he dropped it like it was a live ferret. I wrote "game over" at that juncture. Third, Dallas did run one really sweet play -- a play we rarely see, and I don't understand why. Scoreboard reading 26-13 at the start of the fourth quarter, the Cowboys lined up for a deuce attempt. Everybody split wide, empty backfield; the Giants' defenders frantically spread wide to stop the wacky pass they expected; Romo simply went straight up the middle for two points. When you spread the field at the goal line, often the result is five offensive linemen blocking only five defenders in the box, and the odds for a successful quarterback sneak are excellent.

Giants note: At this point Tiki Barber, TTNYP ("The Toast of New York"), should replace Brett Favre as the most admired player in the NFL, and as the one who exemplifies the best of football culture. This guy plays amazingly well -- last night when the Giants needed power running, he even did that. Barber has played at a high level for a long time. He never complains, refuses to blame others and never whines about his contract. He's well-read and well-informed. He radiates the fact that he knows football is just entertainment, that there are a thousand things in the world that matter a thousand times more. An awful lot of football is idiotic or even harmful. Fairly it may be asked, "What has football produced that can be admired?" One answer is, "Tiki Barber." Only Barber knows how his knees and ribs feel when he wakes up the day after a game -- the morning after is always the worst. If his time to step aside is coming, so be it. But Tiki, you're the bomb.

**Sweet Play of the Week No. 1:** Game scoreless, Philadelphia faced a third-and-4 on its own 33. The Eagles came out with two wide receivers to the left; City of Tampa blitzed six. Ronde Barber was lined up to cover the slot man, but the instant Donovan McNabb turned to throw left, Barber "jumped the route" -- assumed he knew where the throw was going -- and cut in front of the outside receiver, intercepting the pass and returning it for a touchdown. Tampa coaches must have noticed in film study that McNabb liked to throw a quick slant to the outside guy of two in these situations, because Barber is a methodical player, not a gambler. (Barber left his own man uncovered, which could have been a disaster had McNabb looked that way.) Later Barber cut in front of a Philadelphia receiver for another touchdown return off an interception, as the Bucs' defense scored two touchdowns while the Bucs' offense recorded three field goals.

**Sweet Play of the Week No. 2** Atlanta had just scored in the second quarter to pull within 17-14 of Pittsburgh. Kickoff man Mike Koenen adjusted the ball, turned to walk away -- and suddenly turned back around for a snap onside kick. At that moment some Steelers were looking toward each other, not the action. Onside recovered, Atlanta scored on the possession and went on to win in overtime. Atlanta's league-leading running game outrushed Pittsburgh 173 yards to 55 yards. Cautionary note: The Falcons' defense has given up 891 yards and 65 points in its last two home games.

**Sweet 'N' Sour Play:** Game tied, Carolina had a first-and-10 on the Cincinnati 20. Blocking fullback Nick Goings lined up far right, like a flanker. Occasionally teams split out the fullback, but it's usually a diversion to draw defenders from the real action. Goings went straight up the field into the end zone, where Jake Delhomme hit him with a touchdown pass. Sending the fullback deep --

that was sweet. No one from Cincinnati covered Goings, who was, after all, an eligible receiver. That was sour.

**Sweet Tactic of the Week:** The Jets went no-huddle the entire game, confusing the Lions' defense. Now the Lions' defense is easily confused, but the tactic was especially apt because Detroit was starting several who-dats in place of injured or suspended defenders. Eric "I Was a Teenaged Coach" Mangini is 4-3 and as the season progresses the Jets face a motorcade of losers -- Cleveland, Houston, Green Bay, Buffalo, Miami, Oakland. Don't be surprised to see this team play in January.

**Sour Play of the Week No. 1:** Trailing 20-6 with 1:42 remaining in the first half, San Diego reached first-and-10 on the Kansas City 30, out of timeouts. Philip Rivers hustled the Bolts to the line and *spiked the ball*. Huh? There's plenty of time, and a spike costs a down! After running just two plays instead of three, San Diego missed a 47-yard field goal attempt with oodles of time remaining on the clock. Every week there is one play TMQ watches over and over again in rapt fascination, and this week, this was it. Why did Rivers spike the ball with ample time left?

**Sour Play of the Week No. 2:** In the previous week's game against Kansas City, Hines Ward caught a touchdown pass from about the 10-yard line by running a simple buttonhook route into the end zone and being ignored by the Chiefs' defense, which instead doubled up on other receivers on the same side. Now it's Pittsburgh at Atlanta and presumably the Falcons have watched film of their opponent. Trailing 7-3, the Hypocycloids have a third-and-goal on the Atlanta 11. Three receivers line up on the right side. Ward runs a simple buttonhook into the end zone and is ignored by the Falcons' defense, which instead doubled up on other receivers on the same side.

**Sweet 'N' Sour Pair of Plays:** Reader Diane Firstman of Brooklyn, N.Y., has pointed out that if you're going to call a trick pass, have a running back, not a wide receiver, throw the ball. A wide receiver pass might have worked in the last Super Bowl, but the odds say it's a bad call. In the 2004 season, running backs were 7 of 12 passing for six touchdowns and one interception, while wide receivers were 5 of 25 passing for two touchdowns and three interceptions. On Sunday, the Raiders were cruising at 22-6 until Oakland's coaches called a trick-play pass by wide receiver Ronald Curry (who did play QB at North Carolina); the wild interception he heave-hoed created what little late drama this game offered. Compare that to the touchdown pass thrown by Minnesota running back Mewelde Moore. The play diagrams looked better for the Vikings' play than the Raiders', too. Curry was throwing deep, while Moore's receiver was directly in front of him about 10 yards away. Moore's option was simple: Throw if the man is completely uncovered, otherwise just run.

**Amusement Value Play of the Week:** Trailing Washington 14-10 with 46 seconds remaining in the first half, Indianapolis faced a second-and-goal on the Skins' 2. Marvin Harrison lined up wide right, then came in motion back toward the formation, then stopped at the shoulder of the Colts' right tackle. Usually a receiver who does this on a short-yardage play will lead the blocking for a runner coming right behind him. At the snap, Colts tailback Dominic Rhodes came straight behind Harrison -- who stepped out of his way and stood there, making no attempt to block anyone. Run stuffed. Normally I'd slam this as a sour play but as Harrison came in motion before the snap, I thought, "There's no way Marvin Harrison should dive into the line and lead block." Apparently he felt the same. Harrison made up for it by catching two touchdown passes in similar goal-to-go situations.

**Maroon Zone Play of the Week:** Trailing Carolina 14-10 on a blustery afternoon, Cincinnati faced a fourth-and-1 on the Cats' 35 with 9:13 remaining. This is the Maroon Zone -- too close to punt, too far for a field goal attempt. On fourth-and-1 in the Maroon Zone, you should either power-rush or play-fake and throw deep. Cincinnati did the latter, Carson Palmer connecting for 32 yards to

Chad Johnson. That set up the winning touchdown. Green Bay also went for it on fourth-and-1 from the Miami 41, setting up the icing touchdown.

**Jeans in Poor Condition Cost More Than Jeans in Good Condition -- Only in America!** Last February, TMQ marveled at \$198 "premium destroyed" jeans from Abercrombie. Imagine, I wrote, trying to explain to someone in Bangladesh who is impoverished partly by lack of fair-trade laws that Americans pay extra to have their pants damaged. Consider now that an Italian company called Martelli Lavorazioni Tessili had \$140 million in revenue in 2005 -- all from smashing up expensive jeans and other fashion wear to make the items look misused. "Careful attention to vintage forms the basis of Martelli's artistic path," the company declares of [its work shredding and discoloring jeans](#), showing a pair of jeans that appear to have been found at the bottom of a collapsed mine shaft. Imagine trying to explain to someone in Bangladesh that destroying perfectly good jeans has proven a boom business for a company.

**Pun Alert:** Last week scandal-plagued Hewlett Packard admitted it hired a private eye to go through the household trash of Wall Street Journal reporter Pui-Wing Tam. Going through trash -- why, that's beyond the pail!

**Most of Universe Still Missing:** "We have confirmed that at least 80 percent of the material in the universe consists of an invisible dark matter whose nature is not yet understood," Dr. Sarah Bridle, a physicist at University College of London, announced in May. We don't know what 80 percent of the universe is -- but trust us, we're experts! Bridle spoke in conjunction with the unveiling of the first large [three-dimensional map](#) of the locations of galaxies in the observable universe. This mega-atlas shows the galaxies moving as if being acted upon by far more force than could be accounted for by the matter and energy present in stars, stellar nebulae, black holes and other known cosmic objects. Hence, the map represents more support for the vexing speculation that most of the universe exists as "dark matter" and "dark energy," commodities we don't see because they are not found in our galaxy, the Milky Way. Bridle's calculations suggests the ordinary matter from which the Milky Way formed might constitute only a fraction of the larger universe. Or to flip it around, what we consider ordinary matter might, in cosmic terms, be the weird stuff, with most of the universe made of something entirely different. Reader Rusty Neff of White Salmon, Wash., adds that a few months after Bridle's map was released, NASA researchers claimed the [first observational evidence of dark matter](#), in a distant galactic cluster known to astronomers as 1E0657-56. And actually it does not surprise me that scientists are unable to locate most of the universe. Surely at this initial stage in the human quest for knowledge, men and women barely grasp the basics of the cosmos and physical law. My personal guess is that so far we know 1 percent of what there is to know.

**We're All Professionals Here:** ESPN's pregame coverage on Sunday, "NFL Countdown," touted San Diego as the AFC's best team. The Bolts took the field at Kansas City and their first four possessions went fumble, punt, interception, fumble.

**At Happy Hour in Hell's Sports Bar, They Offer Free Chicago Cheesesteaks, Philadelphia Wings and Buffalo Deep-Dish Pizza:** Hell's sports bar has 28 wide-screen plasma TVs, and on Sunday all were showing Arizona at Oakland. For the highlight show, all 28 screens showed nothing but, over and over, Arizona kicking a field goal from the Oakland 19 though down 22-6 in the fourth quarter.

**Stop Me Before I Blitz Again! No. 1:** Kansas City led 27-13 early in the fourth quarter and had San Diego facing a fourth-and-3 on the Chiefs' 37. The Chiefs blitzed seven, which is like handing

out an engraved card reading, "Please accept our invitation to score a touchdown." Which the Chargers did on a simple flare pass to LaDainian Tomlinson.

**Stop Me Before I Blitz Again! No. 2:** Denver leading 10-0 in the third, the Broncos faced a second-and-goal on the Cleveland 9. The Browns blitzed seven, which is like handing out an engraved card reading, "Please accept our invitation to score a touchdown." Which the Broncos did, icing the game with a six-point pass to Brandon Marshall.

**One Fascinating Life:** The below obituary, of a man neither you nor I ever heard of, appeared in the Washington Post last week. Every word of this obituary is fascinating. The life's story told represented, for me, an argument why God would remain interested in human affairs:

*Harald Lindes, 85, former editor of the U.S. Information Agency's Russian-language magazine Amerika, died Oct. 11 at the Deer's Head Hospital Center in Salisbury, Md. Mr. Lindes worked for the USIA for 21 years, starting under broadcaster Edward R. Murrow during the Kennedy administration. Mr. Lindes retired in 1980, then worked for about five years as a personal assistant to cellist Mstislav Rostropovich, former director of the National Symphony Orchestra.*

*Mr. Lindes was born in St. Petersburg, Russia. When he was 15, his father was arrested and executed, and his family was exiled to Siberia. In 1939, he returned to study in his native city but in 1942 was arrested by the Stalin regime, sentenced to a labor camp and sent to the Finnish front, where he was captured by the Finns. Because of his German name, he was handed over to the Germans, where he was drafted into the German army.*

*After World War II, he left Europe and moved to New York and then Monterey, Calif. He became a master sergeant in the Army Reserves and began teaching Russian at what is now the Defense Language Institute in Monterey. He moved to the Washington area in 1958, working briefly for the Voice of America before joining the USIA.*

*Apart from work, he enjoyed researching his genealogy at the Library of Congress and reading Russian history and works of world culture and religion. He also enjoyed travel and growing vegetables and herbs at his home in Kensington. Survivors include his wife of 60 years, Olga Lindes of Kensington; two children, Nina Willett of Ocean Pines, Md., and Hal Lindes, a guitarist in the rock group Dire Straits, of Los Angeles; and seven grandchildren.*

**Buck-Buck-Brawckkkkkk No. 1:** Trailing 21-3 with 11:50 remaining in the contest, Buffalo faced a fourth-and-9 on the New England 28. In trotted the field goal unit. What does a field goal here accomplish except perhaps make the final score less embarrassing? Entering this game, the Bills had been defeated in 11 of their past 12 outings against New England. Play to win! Play to win! Plus you're 2-4, what do you have to lose? And now you're 2-5. Note: You deserve to be 2-5. New England led 7-3 and faced a third-and-10 on the Buffalo 21. Tom Brady was hemmed in by the rush, danced around a bit and then simply took a knee for a loss of yardage. After Brady went down -- the rules specify that when a ballcarrier voluntarily goes to his knee, the play ends -- Buffalo's London Fletcher body-slammed the kneeling quarterback. There's dumb, there's stupid and there's beyond-classification; this was the last one. Rather than attempt a field goal, New England got a first down, scored a touchdown on the possession, and TMQ wrote the words "game over" in his notebook.

**Warning, Serious Item:** Of the many moral questions regarding the Iraq War, the one the American political and media systems are not dealing with in any way, shape or form is the number of Iraqi deaths. A few months ago President Bush said the estimate he has been given by military intelligence is 30,000 Iraqi deaths caused either directly by our military or set in motion by our invasion. American forces have been trying to avoid killing the innocent. But no matter how

carefully our armed forces have behaved, why is the American conscience not shocked by so many innocent people killed owing to our unilateral decision to seize another nation? Why did the media shrug when Bush used this shocking figure?

Had some other country or group done something that caused 30,000 deaths here, we would claim an unlimited right of self-defense and retaliation. Yet the death the United States has brought to the innocent of Iraq isn't even being discussed here. Some of the Iraqis who have died because they have been hit by our bombs, or in the sectarian violence our destruction of the Iraqi government set loose, would have died by now regardless; perhaps some of them would have been killed by Saddam Hussein, had he remained in power. But by invading Iraq we made ourselves responsible for what happened next, and what has happened next is killing of the innocent. When 3,000 were villainously slain here, we called it a crime against humanity. Since then we have caused or played a role in the deaths of perhaps 10 times as many in Iraq, and this is spoken of here as if it were some mere unfortunate side effect of policy. History may judge America harshly for acting as though Iraqi lives have no value.

I suspect one reason the Iraq death toll elicits so little concern is that exaggerated estimates exist. Americans can say of the exaggerated estimates, "Oh, that's way too high" and skip over thinking about the more probable numbers. The latest silly estimate comes from a new study in the [British medical journal Lancet](#), which absurdly estimates that since March 2003 exactly 654,965 Iraqis have died as a consequence of American action. The study uses extremely loose methods of estimation, including attributing about half its total to "unknown causes." The study also commits the logical offense of multiplying a series of estimates, then treating the result as precise. White House officials have dismissed the Lancet study, and they should. It's gibberish.

But gibberish that diverts attention from the real numbers. Let's assume the estimate given to George W. Bush is correct, and 30,000 Iraqis have died because of the American invasion. Let's assume half were members of Iraqi military engaged in combat and thus fair targets under the laws of war, setting aside whether the fighting, initiated by us, was morally justified. That still leaves 15,000 innocent dead on our hands. But not on our consciences, since no one is talking about this.

**Buck-Buck-Brawckkkkkk No. 2:** Trailing Indianapolis 33-14, Washington faced fourth-and-5 on the Colts' 17 with 10:15 remaining. A field goal here only cuts the margin to 16 points, meaning the Redskins still must score two touchdowns and two deuce conversions while shutting Indianapolis down for the remainder of the contest. Chances of this? One-in-10, at best. Going for it would offer a roughly 50/50 chance of a first down, then perhaps a touchdown that makes the rest of the game interesting. As the field goal unit trotted onto the field, TMQ wrote the words "game over" in his notebook. Outraged, the football gods pushed the try wide.

**Best Blocks:** Fantasy leaguers were thrilled by the 95-yard touchdown run by Chester Taylor, but what impressed TMQ was the blocking. Center Matt Birk had a perfect block at the point of attack while tackle Bryant McKinnie made the too-rare "secondary" block -- first he blocked his assigned man, then hustled to block someone else. On Ahman Green's 70-yard touchdown run for Green Bay, the backbreaker against Miami, perfect blocks were thrown by tackles Mark Tauscher and Daryn Colledge. Green went the distance untouched: It's pretty fun to run 70 yards for six points when everyone in front of you already has been knocked to the ground. Reverse of best blocks: The Cincinnati offensive line, which gave up 21 sacks in 2005, already has surrendered 19 in 2006.

**New Record for CEO Gluttony:** Last week William McGuire, CEO of insurer UnitedHealth and a centerpiece of the latest corporate-boardroom scandal (backdated stock options) agreed to leave the company. The Wall Street Journal estimated that for his 14 years running UnitedHealth, McGuire

pocketed a total of about \$1.6 billion. That's \$457,000 per day, or \$57,000 *per working hour*. So McGuire paid himself more per hour than the median American annual household income. And this was during a period when UnitedHealth was cutting benefits to those it insures, cutting benefits received by its own workers, and cutting payments to physicians and hospitals for health care. Obviously this greedy little man is beyond disgrace: To experience disgrace, one must have a conscience. But why isn't McGuire's \$1.6 billion simply considered theft from shareholders? UnitedHealth is a public company, and there is no possibility the fantastic amount was justified by market forces -- that is, that the UnitedHealth board could not have found a similarly qualified CEO for less than \$1.6 billion.

**Miami Dolphins Sack-O-Meter:** Everybody in the sports-pundit world predicted great things for the Marine Mammals 2006 because they wanted to believe Miami was back. There was that six-game winning run at the end of 2006, though as TMQ pointed out at the time, only one victory came in a meaningful game against a winning team. But all sports nuts love the Miami area. Sportswriters and sportscasters itch for reasons to go to Miami on expense accounts -- then hang out in the great clubs, eat stone crabs and gawk at babes in thong bikinis on South Beach, now the No. 1 babe-watching destination in the Western Hemisphere. (Readers, if you contest that judgment, send pictures.) Nick Saban has a rep as a man's-man coach, so the sports-yak world wanted to believe Saban is a super-genius who somehow knows something about coaching that nobody else knows. South Florida is a trendy destination for athletes, agents and celebs, has an NBA crown and two World Series titles, and needed only a Dolphins rebound to complete the picture. The feel and mystique of the Miami franchise -- how could you not win with that in your corner? And the gorgeous Dolphins' cheerleaders, how could you not win with them dancing on your sideline? ESPN The Magazine and Sports Illustrated said Miami would make the Super Bowl, while others were nearly as sanguine.

The considerable wishful thinking about the now 1-6 Dolphins was not tempered by realism about their roster. It's not just two high-priced struggling quarterbacks who both were shown the door by previous employers. It's everybody else, too. Look who started [Sunday against Green Bay](#). The defensive line -- all retreads from other clubs. The linebackers -- a couple of nice players in decline (Jason Taylor is a linebacker now). The defensive backs -- who are these guys? Mostly rejects from other teams; one was recently let go by Oakland! Miami has some decent talent at running back and receiver. Then there's the offensive line, which has surrendered 26 sacks, second-worst in the league. The right guard was let go in consecutive offseasons by Arizona and then Cleveland. The right tackle is a No. 1 draft pick who couldn't handle the pressure at left tackle. On Sunday only three players started for Miami who would start for New England, Denver, Chicago or a similar quality team: Chris Chambers, Geno James and Taylor. In recent years the Dolphins have freely squandered draft choices -- two ones for Ricky Williams, a two for Daunte Culpepper, a two for A.J. Feeley, a three for Lamar Gordon. The result is a weak roster of retreads. [Saban has a blog](#), a megabucks beachfront home and a nice panama hat, but no magic fairy dust to sprinkle on these guys. The Dolphins' core problem is a lack of quality players, and there might be unpleasant seasons of rebuilding ahead.

Now a few kind words for Joey Harrington. Though he finished with three interceptions, two of them were perfectly thrown passes that bounced off the hands of the no-account Randy McMichael. Once McMichael seemed like an emerging NFL star; now having to watch him play makes you wince.

**Wacky Martini Watch:** Todd Nemish of Tacoma, Wash., reports that [Sublime, a tres-chic restaurant of Palm Beach, Fla.](#), offers smoked pear, green tea and lychee martinis. Nothing like a little healthful green tea with your triple shot of vodka!

**NFL in Iran Update:** We must be cracking down on Iran, because with several attractive games in the early Sunday slot, Tehran saw [New England at Buffalo](#).

**Houston Texans Sack-O-Meter:** The Houston offensive line allowed just one sack and provided excellent run blocking as the Moo Cows toyed with the supposedly powerful Jacksonville defense. Defense wasn't the only letdown for Jax; the team's offense gained just 220 yards against then NFL's last-ranked defense. Stretching back to last season, Jax is on a 3-4 run. The Jacksonville team does an awful lot of talking; it needs to do more playing. Reader Robert Thee of West Hempstead, N.Y., also notes that a week ago, Jax still had its starters in with three minutes to go and a 38-0 lead over Jersey/B, trying to run up the score. On Sunday, the football gods exacted vengeance.

**Actual Phil Simms Quotes Without Editorial Comment:** Pittsburgh at Atlanta broadcast: "The Steelers like to throw it inside and they like to throw it outside." "When Michael Vick rolls out, he might run it or he might hit a pass or he might throw it away." "The reason this offense works is that they practice it during the week." Also, Simms declared "he's wide open!" of a receiver who was hit before his feet came down.

**Will "Friday Night Lights" Forfeit Its Season for Using Ineligible Actors?** NBC's "Friday Night Lights" is struggling in the ratings race. There's a new episode tonight -- Tuesday Morning Quarterback urges you to tune in while you still can! "Friday Night Lights" is just tremendous: well-made, well-acted, engaging, both visually and intellectually rich. Only a handful of shows in the history of television have attempted to portray the stresses and beauties of average American life, without glamorization, absurd plot contrivances or one-liners. In its effort to capture the fleeting feeling of Grover's Corners small-town life, "Friday Night Lights" is art: and being art, faces a challenge in winning public acceptance. Yet success is possible. I dare you to watch "Friday Night Lights" and try telling me it's not great television!

Here are the good aspects of "Friday Night Lights." First, brilliant cinematography. Many television shows claim to offer theatrical-quality film values; "Friday Night Lights" actually does. NBC has spent a ton of money on "Friday Night Lights," a reported \$2.6 million per episode -- perhaps too much for the long-term survival of the series. In Hollywood, production money often disappears into Ferraris for the director and presidential suites for the cast; "Friday Night Lights" producers are getting their money's worth onto the screen. The episodes have many outdoor scenes, which are more expensive than studio-filmed scenes; lots of crowd scenes; lots of gritty depictions of school corridors, parking lots, restaurants, gas stations and other standbys of daily life. (The greater the number of scenes, the more expensive an hour of television is to produce; many contemporary TV dramas have too many scene shifts, but that's a separate issue.) Next, the acting is first rate. Third, the situations and characters presented are as close to real life as television can come. Yes, the cast is better looking than any representative sample of actual people, and 25-year-olds play 17-year-olds. But there's no over-glamorized action, no preposterous subplots. Surely "Friday Night Lights" would have stood a better ratings chance had the show been some "Gilmore Girls"-esque teen inanity. Instead "Friday Night Lights" challenges viewers with material that isn't flashy or pumped up.

Now to the not-so-good aspects. The pilot episode not only was a total downer -- it ended with the character you thought would be the series focus being paralyzed for life -- but gave viewers the impression the show held small-town life and prep football in disdain. The pilot was heavy on

subliminals suggesting the producers thought the sort of people who play or care about high school football are rubes or have warped values. That view might be defensible as an artistic choice, but my informal survey of friends who love football culture and who watched the pilot was unanimous on this point: Everyone one of them said that if "Friday Night Lights" was going to be about bashing football, they weren't going to watch. It turns out the show does not think small-town America or people who care about high school sports are weird; subsequent episodes have been sympathetic to the characters and to the town depicted. But as the saying goes, you never get a second chance to make a first impression. Having the pilot be depressing, then end with a character paralyzed and everyone sobbing, was the sort of touch effete Manhattan critics love, but viewers don't -- who wants to watch more of that? The "Friday Night Lights" pilot was a disaster in terms of stating the show's case for its audience. This show would have been better served to start with the second episode, whose concluding image -- the coach and his petrified backup quarterback standing alone on the field of an empty stadium late at night with all the game lights on -- was haunting.

Can "Friday Night Lights" find the ratings numbers to survive? NBC premiered the series at 8 p.m., when teenagers watch. But adults are more likely to be regular viewers, and 10 p.m. a better time slot. To see what happens, NBC will broadcast an episode of "Friday Night Lights" at 10 p.m. on Oct. 30. The trouble is that's a Monday, and thus the episode will air across from ESPN's "Monday Night Football." Come on NBC, we know you have staff cutbacks, but surely you could afford to have someone check first to see what else is on that night!

Here's my radical notion to save "Friday Night Lights": The show should be marketed to women. Though "Friday Night Lights" has contact drills and running hills and football insider terminology such as "skinny post," the true subject of this series isn't sports. The true subject is teenagers under the pressure of contemporary life. The same scenes of tense family life, husband-wife strain and economic insecurity that turn off viewers who expected all-out sports action ought to give "Friday Night Lights" considerable appeal to women. Also, the show could be marketed to upper-income female viewers as a way for them to get in touch with an aspect of society that all the men around them care about but they don't understand. (Working-class women generally already understand football, it's the upper-income women who don't.) NBC, this show will soon be facing fourth-and-99! Market "Friday Night Lights" to women to save the series.

**Worst Crowd Reaction:** As Seneca Wallace, in for the injured Matt Hasselbeck, fumbled late in Seattle's loss to Minnesota, the Qwest Field crowd loudly booed. Sure the Seahawks went to the Super Bowl last season and came into this game with a 12-game home winning streak, but what have you done for us lately? And remember Qwest crowd, Wallace is your leader now. Booing him accomplishes exactly nothing.

**I'm Pickin' Up Good Vibrations:** First my television set shook from ecstatic cheering as the Buccaneers hit a 62-yard field goal on the final play to win at home, then a moment later my laptop shook from ecstatic cheering as I listened to the radio call of Kansas City hitting a 53-yard field goal on the final play to win at home.

**Trust Us, We're Experts:** Sports Illustrated predicted Carolina and Miami would meet in the Super Bowl. The teams are a combined 5-9. Three weeks ago, ESPN: The Magazine ("Published on Earth, the Planet"), which also picked the Dolphins for the Super Bowl, said "there is no need to panic" in Miami because the team "will rally." My advice to the Dolphins? Panic.

**TMQ Ombudsman Needed:** Last week I said my kids' high school "hadn't had a winning season in a decade" before making the playoffs in 2004. As I have now heard from an estimated 99.9 percent

the members of the teams of 1999 and 2000, the school went 7-3 both seasons. You'd think I could get the facts straight about my own local high school!

**TMQ Ombudsman Not Needed:** I took some heat for [my April item](#) saying that not only was D.C.'s tax-subsidized new stadium for the Nationals way too expensive, the plan calls for so little parking, suburbanites will never come. Staff members of the D.C. Council e-mailed to call me an idiot, to say there would be plenty of parking. Headline from page one of last week's Washington Post: STADIUM GARAGE PROPOSALS REJECTED. D.C. Plan Now Lacks Parking." Not only did the original plan call for a ridiculously low 1,225 spaces, or one parking place per 34 seats in the ballpark -- the new Yankee Stadium will have 10,000 parking spaces, one per 5.3 seats -- even provisions for that mini-garage have stalled. As of the moment, the cunning master plan is for the new Nationals facility to offer no parking at all. Let me repeat my April pronouncement: "When the ballpark project zeroes out the D.C. government's bond rating, please, congressional committees, don't say you weren't warned."

**Massive Re-Spelling, In Times and Places of Our Choosing:** Tuesday Morning Quarterback has obtained a memo declaring that "the whole USG" (internal Washingtonese for "United States government") will now refer to the Ukrainian capital as Kyiv, rather than Kiev. This decision was made by unanimous vote of the Board on Geographic Names, which apparently is an actual organization, not an element in a Monty Python sketch. The Board has declared, "Although Kiev remains the conventional name for this city, all State Department and operations are requested to immediately begin using the new spelling Kyiv in all written communications." So we can't stop the North Korean nuclear program, we botched the Iraq war, we've handed a trillion dollars in federal debt to our children, but dadgummit, we will spell the name of the capital of Ukraine any durn way we please. Note: TMQ believes if the NFL expands internationally, the franchise for this city should be called the Kiev Chickens.

**Hidden Plays:** Hidden plays are ones that never make highlight reels, but stop or sustain drives. Two snaps before the Bengals' Reggie Kelly caught a touchdown pass, Carolina cornerback Ken Lucas dropped an interception thrown directly into his hands; the Bengals went on to win by three. And yes that was *the* Reggie Kelly, the tight end Dan Reeves once traded a first-round draft pick for at Atlanta. Kelly was viewed as a bust in Atlanta owing to high expectations, but has gone on to become a solid performer along the Ohio River.

**Obscure College Score of the Week No. 1:** Pittsburg of Kansas 63, Southwest Baptist 20. Pittsburg of Kansas is the Matewan High of college football, a team that seeks out weak opponents then relentlessly runs up the score against them. Two years ago, on its way to having the highest-scoring season in college football history, Pittsburg of Kansas faked a punt while leading 63-7. Then faced with an equal foe, the Gorillas honked the Division II title game. This Saturday, Pittsburg of Kansas led Southwest Baptist 49-17 at the start of the fourth quarter yet continued to pass, relentlessly trying to run up the score on a completely overmatched opponent. Earlier this season, in an ugly display of bad sportsmanship, the Gorillas ran the score up to 87-0 against helpless little Panhandle State. (Currently Panhandle is 0-7 with four losses by at least 50 points.) Apparently they don't have character-education courses at [Pittsburg of Kansas](#) but they do have plenty of punks in the football office. Presumably when Pittsburg of Kansas meets a real opponent in the playoffs it will collapse as usual.

**Obscure College Score of the Week No. 2:** Western New England 3, Endicott 0. Located on a beautiful North Shore hillside in Beverly, Mass., last weekend Endicott recalled simpler times by [playing host to a Saturday night fire pit](#) with cocoa and ghost stories.

**Law of the Obvious (College Edition):** TMQ's Law of the Obvious states: Sometimes all a team needs to do is run the ball up the middle for no gain, and everything will be fine. Leading Michigan State 38-10, Northwestern took possession with 6:31 remaining in the third quarter. Did the Wildcats run, run, run to grind the clock? For the remainder of the contest, Northwestern coaches called 10 rushes and eight passes. Five of the passes clanged incomplete, stopping the clock, while two were intercepted; Michigan State kicked the winning field goal with five ticks remaining on the scoreboard. From the point it took possession with a 38-10 advantage at 6:31 in the third, had Northwestern simply run up the middle for no gain on every play, victory was close to certain. You've got to work hard to blow a 35-point lead, and Northwestern coaches were determined. Craziest call: Leading 38-17 at the end of the third quarter, the Wildcats faced third-and-10 on the Spartans' 11. Run up the middle for no gain then kick the field goal that makes it 41-17, and everything is fine. Instead pass, interception, and a collapse for the record books is set in motion.

**Reader Animadversion:** Got a complaint or a deeply held grievance? Write me at [TMQ\\_ESPN@yahoo.com](mailto:TMQ_ESPN@yahoo.com). Include your real name and the name of your hometown, and I may quote you by name unless you instruct me otherwise. Note: Giving your hometown improves your odds of being quoted.

**Next Week:** The NFL bans players from ingesting dark energy.

**Wednesday, October 25, 2006**

TMQ Nation fires back

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By Gregg Easterbrook

Tuesday Morning Quarterback has long complained that neither the Giants nor the Jets have cheerleaders, though the New York City area is home to hundreds if not thousands of beautiful young women who have dance training and great legs and are looking for their big break. **Barry Negrin of New York City** reports the Jets have taken a step in the right direction with the addition of hot-babe [flag carriers](#). Negrin specifies that in their home loss to Indianapolis, the Jets had no flag carriers. The next home game, a squeaker win against Miami, featured the debut of five female flag carriers, though tastelessly overdressed in sweat suits. The latest home game, Sunday against Detroit, was a rollicking win, no doubt helped by the fact that this time the flag carriers wore tank tops and sprayed-on tights. "Two points may make a line, but three give you grounds to generate a correlation coefficient," Negrin notes of the obvious upswing in approval by the football gods.

**Alice Tremont of Rochester Hills, Mich.** writes, "I am a law student at [Thomas Cooley Law School](#) in the evenings. I have civil procedure on Tuesday nights. You cannot imagine how excruciatingly dull this is, like entering some bizarre space-time continuum where time slows to a crawl and every minute expands to inestimable lengths. If not for the availability of wireless Internet and your column, I am sure I would have died of sheer boredom already." So Alice, you read TMQ during class -- you have your priorities in order!

Recent columns speculated that increased attention to high school football will bring to the game's last bastion of purity the problems of the pro and college levels -- money obsession, recruiting scandals, a win-at-all-costs approach, ignoring of education. Already there are high schools with football-factory reputations that either openly or covertly recruit, urging the best players to transfer in, which only leads to more lopsided outcomes in which powerhouse teams crush weak teams. **Paul Hamann of Redmond, Wash.** notes that

Bellevue High outside Seattle, winner of four of the last five Washington state big-school titles, was recently investigated by its school district for violating anti-recruiting rules, and [only sort of cleared](#). Hamann further notes that the varsity coach at Bellevue High receives \$55,000 per year from the school's booster club. (In some states high school coaches are volunteers, not schoolteachers; the Bellevue coach is a local businessman.) Bellevue's booster club is a private organization handing privately raised money to someone who is not a public employee, so there's no impropriety. But this is just the kind of slippery slope we don't want high school football started down. According to the Seattle Times, Jack Welch, football coach of Copperas Cove High School in Texas, makes \$102,000 as a school-system employee but doesn't teach -- the salary is solely for sports coaching.

Still more on Matewan High, the West Virginia school now synonymous with bad sportsmanship for using a no-huddle hurry-up offense throughout the second half in order to run up the score to 64-



C'mon, off with the  
sweatsuit!

0 and claim a bogus single-game rushing "record" for a player. Up to and including the night Matewan did this, it was 5-0. Since that night, notes **Catey Aaron of Morgantown, W.Va.**, Matewan has lost three consecutive games and tumbled out of state playoff contention. The boy with the bogus "record," previously viewed as a leader for the Kennedy Award, given to the state's top high school football player by the West Virginia Sports Writers Association, is now considered an unlikely candidate. Surely the West Virginia Sports Writers Association will have the good sense to grant this distinction to a player and school whose behavior reflects honorably on the state. Postscript: The tiny, helpless school Matewan trounced 64-0 is now 0-8. The more you learn about that night, the more disgusting the whole thing sounds.

**Craig Bursch of Duluth, Minn.** notes, "I hate arrogant coaches who run up the score as much as you do." He was among many readers to observe that Pittsburg State of Kansas is promoting coach Chuck Broyles for the [Division II Liberty Mutual Coach of the Year](#). Two years ago, Broyles ordered a fake punt when ahead 63-7; this season he committed an ugly act of bad sportsmanship by running up the score to 87-0 against defenseless Panhandle State, which could barely dress enough players for the game. **Scott Anderson of Los Angeles** points out that candidates for the Liberty Mutual Coach of the Year award must demonstrate "high ethical standards" and "responsibility ... on the field." Hey Liberty Mutual -- take note that if Chuck Broyles of Pitt State wins your Coach of the Year award, your company will be mocked for honoring a guy who sets a terrible example. Rather than complain, Bursch suggested, TMQ readers should take matters into their own hands and vote for other nominees for this award. You can [go here](#) until Nov. 5 and throw your weight behind some other Division II coach. I just voted for current poll leader Mel Tjeerdsma of Northwest Missouri State, which plays a schedule similar to Pittsburg of Kansas but does not have a history of running up the score. (Northwest Missouri has one runaway-margin victory this season but did not pass in the fourth quarter of that game.)

All told, I'm sick of these stories of college and high school punk coaches who only reveal their own psychological problems by humiliating weak opponents. I'd like to read about *good* sportsmanship for a change. Do you know any recent instance of good sportsmanship, dignified behavior or generosity to the opponent at a high school or small college (Division I-AA or lower) football game? If so, tell me at [TMQ\\_ESPN@yahoo.com](mailto:TMQ_ESPN@yahoo.com), including your real name and hometown. Please be brief, and if available include supporting evidence, such as a newspaper article.

I supposed that human knowledge so far represents no more than "1 percent of what there is to know." **Alex Janevski from Ann Arbor, Mich.** countered, "If you consider that humans have only been acquiring knowledge for a ridiculously slight fraction of the existence of our universe, say a generous estimate of 10,000 years out of the roughly 14 billion years the universe appears to have existed, or .0000007 percent of that time, it seems optimistic to think we would have already amassed 1 percent of what there is to know. I suspect we have learned only a fraction of a percent of what there is to know of the Earth alone, and possess an imperceptible speck of knowledge in the grand scheme of things."



We've got a long way to go in our quest to solve the universe.

Over the years TMQ has called Cincinnati the Tootsie Rolls and the Candy Corns; the Bengals have so many Halloween-themed alternate uniforms, it's hard to keep them straight. **Robyn Chapman of**

**Chesapeake, Ohio** proposes, "Call them the Trick or Treats and be done with it. That way it doesn't matter which version of the uniform they wear." **Nicole Lemoine of Uxbridge, Mass.** suggests that TMQ give a nickname to Jacksonville head coach Jack Del Rio: Jack of the River. Mr. Data, make these so!

**Loic Duchesne of Jouy-le-Moutier, France** notes that if you watch the replay in the NFL.com video section of Ahman Green's 70-yard touchdown run for the Packers at Miami, at the end one of the Dolphins' cheerleaders is seen seated, drinking Gatorade. He asks, "How is the Miami defense supposed to stay professional when its own cheerleaders aren't paying attention?" Duchesne is on the coaching staff of the [Saint Ouen L'Aumone Cougars](#), a French U.S.-rules football club. We're building McDonald's and Wal-Marts in China, promoting tackle football in France -- yes, the U.S. plan for world domination is going smoothly.

As TMQ readers know, my compromise with my Baptist upbringing is to be pro-topless but antigambling. Beyond the harmless \$5 office pool, gambling only brings debt, sorrow and regret. I don't care if Donald Trump plays the roulette wheel in Casino Royale because I don't care how much a rich person loses. But bookie gambling and state-run lotteries are targeted toward the working class and the poor, the state-run lotteries being an exceptionally cynical act on the part of state governments. To top it off, though state-run lotteries urge the poor to throw their money out the window on scratch-off games, the one kind of gambling that's harmless, small-stakes office pools, technically is illegal. (Except in Vermont!) *Gary of Beaverton, Ore.* notes that his state, which bans informal office pools, now is encouraging the working class to throw their money out the window via [state-administered office pools](#). What's next, state of Oregon -- state-sponsored crack sales on street corners?



What's more fun, this stuff or office pools?

**Ben Kessler-Reynolds of Ridgefield, Conn.** writes, "LaDainian Tomlinson is now 6-for-9 passing with five touchdowns and no interceptions in his career, good for a passer rating of 146.8. No wonder Briscoe High offensive coordinator Urban Meyer had him, not Vick, throw the ball on the last play!" **Rob Wold of Antioch, Ill.** offers this generic final score prediction: Manning Team 36, Opponent 22. It worked twice this weekend. I noted that with all the attractive early-slot games this Sunday, the woofers New England at Buffalo pairing was broadcast to Iran. Perhaps this was a CIA PSYOP ploy designed to cause an Iranian uprising! **Alexander Chester of Jerusalem** reports that much of Israel saw Pats at Bills, too. He writes, "It's one thing for America to punish Iran; why punish an ally?"

In a recent commercial for the Kawasaki ATV, notes **Jere and Ann Northridge of State College, Penn.**, as an ATV barrels through a corporate office, destroying all in its path, the disclaimer at the bottom says, "Not the intended use of the vehicle." The phrase "intended use" has meaning in liability law. Is Kawasaki worried that someone will barrel through an office in one of its ATVs, then Kawasaki will be found liable?

Speaking of disclaimers, **Jason Reiser of Philadelphia** writes, "I was crossing a busy intersection in Philadelphia yesterday and noticed a fellow with his head buried in a sheaf of papers, walking across said intersection. I leaned over to see what he was reading and saw the heading Obscure College Score of the Week. Aha, I thought, understanding why he would risk his well-being to catch up on TMQ. But I think your column needs a disclaimer about reading the material while

operating heavy machinery, driving and, of course, crossing the road." Caution -- do not read Tuesday Morning Quarterback while operating tunnel-boring equipment or artillery!

**Monday, October 30, 2006**  
**Updated: November 3, 2:34 PM ET**  
Rocky Mountain high/low

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By Gregg Easterbrook

So my plan was to lead this column by praising the Denver defense, which goes out and gives up 34 points against Indianapolis. Now Denver has allowed 78 points in seven games, bested by Chicago's 69 points allowed. But the Broncos still are having the best defensive season so far, considering they have played four of the league's power teams (Colts, Patriots, Chiefs and Ravens) while the Bears have only played one (Seattle), with Chicago opponents a combined 17-33. Anyway the Colts always stomp the Broncos; it's some horse voodoo thing. We still need to know why the Denver defense is playing so well. Last week, I proposed the Atlanta offense was playing well because the Falcons are daring to use a high school offense. This week, I propose the Denver defense is playing well because the Broncos are daring to use a high school defense.

Watch tape of the Denver defense and you'll be amazed at how plain Jane it is. Almost always a conventional 4-3-4. No stunting before the snap. No overloading one side, not even showing overload then backing out. No linebackers shooting gaps. No press corners. Almost no blitzing. Most remarkable by recent NFL standards, the linebackers and cornerbacks are six yards off the line, rather than three to four yards as virtually all other teams use. This year, the Broncos have lined up almost every down in a classical by-the-book defensive set with everyone in the standard position and not moving. If you attend a lot of high school football, as I do, you know: *This is exactly how high school defenses play.*

Denver's lack of blitzing is what might jump out at the casual spectator. According to NFL analyst Pat Kirwan, last season Denver blitzed on 16 percent of opponent snaps, somewhat above the league average. This season, Denver has hardly blitzed at all -- just three blitzes in 60 Colts snaps Sunday, a 5 percent blitz rate. Most high school teams rarely blitz, because the blitz leads to big plays surrendered. In recent seasons, NFL defensive coordinators have boasted about sacks and turnovers off the blitz, then changed the subject when some party-pooper like me mentions big plays surrendered. I've heard that in the offseason, Denver coach Mike Shanahan decided he wanted to limit big plays. That meant little blitzing.



Denver's defense had a hiccup against Indy, but they're still having an outstanding year.

The lack of pre-snap movement by the Denver defense is less obvious, but equally high school-ish. In recent seasons, NFL defensive coaches have gone ga-ga for unorthodox looks and jumping around before the snap to confuse blocking schemes. High school defensive coaches traditionally are more concerned with making sure everyone is in the right place before the snap. That means conventional static sets: exactly what Denver is using! Sunday, Peyton Manning almost never did his "chicken dance." He audibled and pointed around less than he has in years -- and the reason was the defense was not shifting, so he had nothing to point about. Maybe the effectiveness of the 2006 Denver defense will wear off as opponents figure out what the Broncs are up to. I suspect this

defense has worked well so far because other teams come into games expecting the Denver defense to jump around and show unconventional looks like everyone else, and aren't prepared for orthodoxy!

In more football news, examples of bad sportsmanship have been all too frequent this season, with many college and high school teams relentlessly running up the score. (Running up the score is fairly rare in the NFL.) Once I thought that any high school or college team up by 50 points should begin kneeling on the ball, even if it was the third quarter. Letters from coaches and former players have persuaded me that proposal is impractical. To my complaints about running up the score, coaches and former players have countered: How do we know when we've scored enough, and how can we send out the second- or third-string but not let them run regular plays? Therefore let me propose a practical guide to points sportsmanship.

- First, teams may score at will in the first half. Even if you're ahead by a huge margin it's fine to throw deep or do anything else, until intermission.

<http://sports.espn.go.com/espn/print?id=2644034&type=Page2Story&imagesPrint=off>• In the second half, scoring is no longer needed if a team leads by 40 points in the third quarter or 30 points in the fourth quarter. Michigan State just proved it is physically possible to overcome a 35-point lead in the third quarter. But since that has now happened once in a century of college competition and never in the NFL, a 40-point lead in third quarter signals it is time to rein in the horses, while a 30-point lead in the fourth quarter signals the same.

- Once an unassailable lead has been achieved, teams may continue to run regular plays -- but if scoring a touchdown, players should kneel on all PAT tries. This is my Big Important Proposal. You're ahead 42-0 at the start of the fourth quarter. The starters are all seated, but you can't tell the subs to do nothing but run up the middle for an entire quarter. You let them run most of the playbook except deep passes, reverses and so on. They score a touchdown making it 48-0, and you kneel on the PAT try, even if there's a quarter remaining. Extra points are, after all, "extra" points. Once a huge lead is attained, "extra" points are totally unneeded. With an insurmountable lead you've got to run some kind of offense, but you don't have to try extra points. By kneeling on all extra-point plays after attaining a huge lead, the victor would communicate respect for its opponents and make clear that it is not trying to inflate the score, merely running its offense until the game ends. Also, this solution allows the second- and third-teams their chance to run the regular offense. Coaches of powerhouse college and high school teams: Start kneeling on those PATs in the second half.

Let's sum this up as Tuesday Morning Quarterback Law of Fair-Play Scoring. One, all is fair in the first half. Two, after attaining a 40-point lead in the third quarter or a 30-point lead in the fourth quarter, no starters on the field and no deep-strike plays. Three, if you do score with either of these leads, kneel on the point-after, no matter what the clock. Isn't this a decent proposal for a common understanding of how to avoid running up the score and the bad feelings it engenders all around? I'd think any coach could live with the Law of Fair-Play Scoring -- any coach except a bad sport, of course.

Just one month ago, TMQ asked, "How soon 'til Steelers fans start booing Ben Roethlisberger?" Sure he came into the season having just won the Super Bowl and was 28-4 as an NFL starter. But now Roethlisberger is 1-4 this season and already has thrown 11 interceptions, including a dreadful pick this Sunday into triple coverage at the Raiders' goal line. Had Roethlisberger simply tossed the ball away on that down, the field goal on the next play makes it Oakland 13, Pittsburgh 9; instead

the interception went the distance in the opposite direction making it Oakland 20, Pittsburgh 6. I'll ask again: How soon 'til Steelers fans start booing Ben Roethlisberger?

In other football news, man, what great games this weekend! Kansas City-Seattle, Atlanta-Cincinnati, Indianapolis-Denver, Jacksonville-Philadelphia, Baltimore-New Orleans and New England-Minnesota were all strong matchups. Why so many strong pairings? The four bye teams -- Buffalo, Detroit, Miami and Washington -- had a combined record of 6-22. Most of the cupcakes took the weekend off, and the result was the games played were tremendous. TMQ's suggestion to improve NFL play: Let these four teams take the rest of the season off.

And in still more sports news, last week I asked readers for examples of dignified or generous behavior by college or high school teams. I am happy to report many such examples of good sportsmanship below.

**Stats of the Week No. 1:** Undefeated Chicago is winning by an average of 22 points per game.

**Stats of the Week No. 2:** Since leading undefeated Chicago by 20 points at home at the end of the third quarter, Arizona has lost three straight and been outscored 23-74.

**Stats of the Week No. 3:** Seattle allowed 16 points in its first two games and has been allowing 32 points a game since.

**Stats of the Week No. 4:** Pittsburgh is 2-5 despite outscoring its opponents.

**Stats of the Week No. 5:** Five teams already have more than 200 points but one of them, Philadelphia, does not have a winning record.

**Stats of the Week No. 6:** All NFC West teams have lost at least two straight games; the division is on a combined 0-13 streak. Reader stat submitted by Sharp Richmond of Mount Airy, Md.

**Stats of the Week No. 7:** College stats bonus: In a four-point loss to Texas, Texas Tech had 519 yards passing and minus-1 yard rushing.

**Stats of the Week No. 8:** In the last quarter-century, Seattle is 2-19 at Arrowhead Stadium.

**Stats of the Week No. 9:** Cincinnati's offensive line already has given up as many sacks as it did in the entire 2005 season.

**Stats of the Week No. 10:** Discounting meaningless contests played after the Colts locked their best postseason seeding, Indianapolis has won 28 consecutive regular-season games.

**Cheerleader of the Week (Halloween Special):** In the last week, the nation's news pages have been filled with reports of a national craze for teenaged girls and young women wearing revealing Halloween costumes with hardcore themes such as French maid or bondage harness -- see [this New York Times article](#) by Stephanie Rosenbloom. On Saturday night, TMQ and the Official Wife attended a trendy Halloween party, and there beheld one woman in a super-skimpy French maid's costume including accessories that would be worn only by a very obedient maid, another woman in a mermaid outfit that came close to the topless look reported by ancient sailors who struggled to resist these creatures.

For more than a decade, studies have reported declining sexual activity, especially among the young -- fewer teens below age 18 who have had intercourse, later age of first intercourse, fewer total sexual partners by most people, falling rates of teen pregnancy. (That teen pregnancy was in 2005 [at its lowest rate ever in the United States](#) is the kind of positive news the media never get around to reporting.) At the same time that take-it-slow and monogamy are rising, teen girls and young

women wear ever-more-revealing clothes and, now, sex-themed Halloween costumes. Tuesday Morning Quarterback does not pretend to understand the paradoxical trend of declining sex coupled to increased sexiness. But I can tell you who was there first: NFL cheerleaders!

The fad for high-sex-appeal NFL cheerleaders began about 20 years ago, and not long after that studies began to show lessening incidence of young-teen sex and frequent promiscuous sex. Five to 10 years ago, NFL cheerleaders began sporting sexy Halloween costumes. Naughty nurse, naughty elf, naughty serving girl, scantily attired devil, let's-play-doctor doctor -- all have been done on an NFL sideline on Halloween weekend in recent seasons. Can an NFL cheer-babe dominatrix cracking her whip be far behind? Spectators are grateful, needless to say. But just as the larger social trend seems to be more sex appeal coupled to less sex, the put-it-out-there sexiness of cheerleaders' Halloween costumes seems more aesthetic than arousing. Somehow, NFL cheerleaders can be really good looking and nearly naked without suggesting the erotic: the image presented is one of attractiveness, fitness and body confidence, rather than of sex itself. This must tell us something about society -- I just have no idea what. At any rate, throughout this column TMQ celebrates the weekend's cheerleader Halloween costumes.

**Label on Patriots' Helmet: Insert Player, Perform Well:** Doug Gabriel, Reche Caldwell, Junior Seau -- nobody else in the league wants 'em, you put 'em in a Patriots uniform and they're stars. Last night on "Monday Night Football," the New England Patriots once again rolled out castoffs and who-dats to pound another team. Miami said Seau was washed up. Approximately 31 teams passed on Gabriel and Caldwell. Billy Yates started at guard for New England -- his first career start in four seasons. No, I'd never heard of him, either. Yates was cut by Miami, which has a terrible offensive line. Last night Yates played fine for New England. Ryan O'Callaghan started at right tackle for the Flying Elvii. O'Callaghan was the 13th tackle taken in April's draft, selected in the fifth round after a lot of glamour names went, and he's playing great while glamour-name, high-drafted tackles like Winston Justice aren't even on their teams' active lists. Whatever Bill Belichick has, he sprays it on new players awfully quick.

As for the game, it was mere formality after the first possession. And Minnesota was a winning team getting its stuffings kicked out despite the benefit of the mystique of its first "Monday Night Football" home appearance in five years. Minnesota couldn't cover any of the Pats' castoff receivers. Minnesota couldn't get past the Pats' who-dat offensive linemen to pressure Tom Brady, despite the New England five-wide, which meant no halfback to pick up Vikings blitzers. Representative New England perfect play: Leading 10-0, the Patriots faced third-and-12. At the snap, Brady and his tailback sprinted right, influencing the defense that way; then Brady stopped on a dime and threw the half-screen (one blocker) back left to Caldwell. Matt Light, the blocker, patted the Viking at the point of attack and off Caldwell went for a 34-yard gain. New England scored on the possession to make it 17-0 and at that point the Vikings might as well have left to get peanut butter-chocolate Halloween martinis. Everybody sprints one way, then throw the half screen back the other way -- we have this play in my sixth-grader's flag football league playbook, and the New England Patriots can fool the Minnesota Vikings with it.

**Sweet Play of the Week No. 1:** Last week TMQ said teams should spread the field at the goal line, then simply have the quarterback run up the middle with five offensive linemen taking on five defenders in the box. Game scoreless, Baltimore faced third-and-goal on the New Orleans 5. The Nevermores lined up with two wide receivers wide on each side; Saints defenders frantically spread wide; then Steve McNair simply ran straight up the middle for six. Apparently now that Brian Billick is calling his own plays, he's free to call from the Tuesday Morning Quarterback playbook! Baltimore also ran a nice "series" sequence in which one play sets up another. From the New

Orleans 4, the Ravens set three receivers right and had Clarence Moore, the inside guy, run the quick turn-in -- touchdown. Later from the Saints' 6, the Ravens set three right and had Todd Heap, the inside guy, run a quick turn-out -- touchdown; the defense seemed to expect turn-in.

**Sweet Play of the Week No. 2:** Trailing 3-0, Denver faced second-and-goal on the Indianapolis 1. In a variation of the spread-then-sneak action advocated by TMQ, the Broncos came out double tight end with I-backs and a slotback right; then blocking back Kyle Johnson went in motion wide left, drawing a defender with him; at the snap tailback Mike Bell sprinted left, as if expecting a quick flip and drawing a linebacker out of the middle; then Jake Plummer drove straight ahead for six. Earlier in this drive on third-and-long, Plummer sprinted out right then threw a 45-yard completion on the deep zed-out to David Kircus on the left. Considering how far behind the line Plummer was and that his pass traveled across the field right to left, Plummer threw a perfect ball almost 70 yards in the air.

**Sweet Play of the Week No. 3:** Trailing 35-14 in the fourth quarter, New Orleans faced fourth-and-goal on the Baltimore 5. Saints coaches called for seven blockers; Ravens' coaches called a *one-man rush*. One defender rushed, 10 dropped into coverage -- I've never seen it. Seven New Orleans blockers stood walling off one single man while 10 Baltimore defenders covered three receivers. Flummoxed, Drew Brees threw the ball away, for all intent and purpose ending the game. This week, this was the play TMQ obsessively watched over and over. The fascinating thing is that after 10 Baltimore defenders dropped off, there stood Brees surrounded by seven blockers with only one Raven between him and the goal line. Had Brees and his wall of blockers simply surged forward, a touchdown run was likely. But not too many teams practice for a one-man rush! Lite rush bonus: Trailing 29-27 with 13 seconds remaining, Cincinnati lined up for the Hail Mary. The Bengals had six blocking, Atlanta rushed three -- and got the sack.

**Sour Play of the Week No. 1:** Trailing San Diego 14-7 in the third quarter, St. Louis had first-and-10 on the Bolts' 29. Recycled power back Stephen Davis fumbled forward, ball bouncing to the San Diego 21. Usually touchdown returns of fumbles come on those that bounce away from the direction of the play, allowing a defender to "scoop and score" with only green grass ahead. Forward fumbles are usually fallen on in a mass of humanity. In this case, San Diego safety Marlon McCree ran the fumble back 79 yards for a touchdown that was the decisive play in San Diego's win. How did he get away with it? As McCree picked up the loose ball, Les Mouflons' gentlemen simply stood there doing nothing. Hey, highly overpaid St. Louis offensive starters -- "play to the whistle!"

**Sour Play of the Week No. 2:** Trailing Tennessee 7-3 with 18 seconds in the first half, Houston faced third-and-13 on its 46, holding one timeout. David Carr dropped back, was sacked, his fumble returned for a touchdown by the Flaming Thumbtacks. With only 18 seconds and one timeout, what were the odds of anything good happening for the Texans on a third-and-long pass?

**Sour Play of the Week (Matched Set):** When someone other than a quarterback throws on a trick play, the player should be coached thus: Throw only if the receiver is completely unguarded, otherwise just run and we don't care if you take a loss. Baltimore leading 7-0, New Orleans had first-and-goal and called a halfback pass by Reggie Bush. The receiver was double-covered and rather than just run, Bush heave-hoed, interception. Later at Denver, game scoreless, Indianapolis called the halfback pass by Joseph Addai. The receiver was double-covered and rather than just run, Addai heave-hoed, offensive pass interference.

**Sweet 'N' Sour Play:** Brett Favre ran for his first touchdown in five years; that was sweet. As he rolled right, on the outside there was Favre, blocking back Brandon Miree and four Arizona

defenders. Favre motioned Miree into the corner of the end zone -- and *all four defenders* went with the who-dat fullback, ignoring the future first-ballot Hall of Famer as he strolled into the end zone. That was sour.

**You Can Leave a Taurus With the Door Open and the Engine Running, and It Will Be There When You Come Back:** Last week the final Taurus rolled off the assembly line, as Ford ended the two-decade production run of the car. Today the Taurus is thought of as dour and frumpy, but when it debuted in 1985, the car was a breath of fresh air -- the first American-made sedan intended to compete with Honda and Toyota on quality. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the Taurus was the No. 1-selling vehicle in the United States. This car got you where you wanted to go, and there was even once a sexy edition, the Taurus SVO, in monochrome black with big wheels, foreshadowing the current craze for pimped editions of the Chrysler 300 sedan. The world eventually passed the Taurus by. According to the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, in 2005 the Ford Taurus was the nation's least-stolen car.

**Is United Nations Day the New Thanksgiving?** Each year, Tuesday Morning Quarterback bemoans the earlier-and-earlier start of commercialization of Christmas. This year the first Christmas movie, "The Santa Clause III," opens Nov. 3. I saw a Christmas-themed television ad for the Garmin navigational device, complete with fake snow and caroling, on *Oct. 29*.

**Click That Seat Belt!** It's good to hear Indianapolis defensive tackle Montae Reagor is expected to recover from injuries sustained in a recent car crash. Guess what Reagor was driving: an SUV, which rolled over. Though many buyers believe SUVs are safer than regular cars, and manufacturers subtly play to this belief in advertising, statistics show you are more likely to die or be injured inside an SUV than inside a regular car. In low-speed, front-to-rear and side-to-side impacts, SUVs are in fact safer for occupants; but SUVs are so much more likely to roll over at high speed than regular cars that the total risk of death is greater for the person in the SUV. Also, what was Reagor not wearing at the time of the crash?

**Preposterous Punt Watch:** Trailing 14-10 at the end of the third quarter, Dallas threw incomplete on the Carolina 42 on third-and-2, and also was called for holding. Surely, I thought, John Fox will take the penalty to push the Cowboys out of his territory; otherwise they will go for it on fourth-and-2 at the Carolina 42. Instead Fox confidently declined the penalty, and Bill Parcells obliged by ordering a punt *on fourth-and-2 from the opposition 42 while trailing in the second half*. Dallas went on to win the game, but don't tell me Parcells knew Carolina would later commit three turnovers. You're behind in the second half and punting on short yardage in opposition territory!

**At Happy Hour in Hell's Sports Bar, Pitchers Are Just \$5 But the Beer Is Warm -- Unless You're English, In Which Case It's Cold:** Hell's sports bar has 28 wide-screen plasma TVs, and on Sunday all were showing Houston vs. Tennessee at Long Playing Field. For the highlight program, all 28 screens in Hell's Sports Bar showed nothing but, over and over, San Francisco punting in Chicago territory when the Niners were trailing by 41-0.

**Best Purist Drives:** Kansas City drove 88 yards for a touchdown in 13 plays -- 12 of them rushes. Leading 13-3, Jacksonville took possession with 7:27 remaining. Jax ran, ran to grind the clock to 2:45 before punting, and the rest was filler.

**Congress Is Afraid to Do Anything About Petroleum Imports, But Happy to Issue Orders to God:** Enjoy your trick-or-treating in the dark tonight, because starting next Halloween, Daylight Savings Time still will be in effect on Oct. 31. The recent energy bill enacted by Congress -- which contains hundreds of pages of special-interest favors but largely does nothing about energy supply or consumption rates -- had a title lengthening the part of the year when DST remains in effect.

Beginning in 2007, Standard Time will be in effect only from Nov. 4 'til March 9 -- two-thirds of the year will be non-standard, only one-third Standard. (Unless you live in Arizona or Hawaii, which do not observe Daylight Savings Time.) Though I like an extra hour outdoors in the summer too, Daylight Savings Time seems to have gotten completely out of hand. The God-given cycles of sunrise and sunset aren't good enough for us?

Proponents of DST always say that it reduces electricity use, by postponing by one hour the time when all the interior lights of structures are turned on. See Michael Downing's "Spring Forward," an entire book devoted to attacking Daylight Savings Time! Downing acknowledges DST cuts electricity use but maintains it increases petroleum demand, which is more harmful than reducing electricity use is helpful -- especially considering Congress refuses to enact a meaningful energy policy. "Spring Forward" demonstrates that the primary energy impact of the extra hour of evening daylight is to cause people to drive places to do things; and while the United States has centuries' worth of coal and uranium to make electricity, we're already too dependent on imported petroleum from Persian Gulf dictatorships. What sinister conspiracy does Downing believe is behind the extension of Daylight Savings Time? The golf industry! Spring Forward asserts the extra month of DST added that Congress mandated in 1986 "represents \$400 million in added annual sales and fees" to golf-course operators because more people play in the evening.

**The Obvious Solution Is to Rename It "Politically Correct Time":** Speaking of Standard Time, since 1847 the world's time has been judged in relation to the [Royal Observatory](#) in Greenwich, United Kingdom. In the days of sailing ships, Greenwich Mean Time was what British sailors set their timepieces to, in order to calculate longitude. Gradually, hours plus-or-minus GMT was accepted as the world standard for delineating time zones. Of course it's an arbitrary standard -- some place on Earth must be chosen, and whatever place is chosen would be arbitrary. In recent years a politically correct movement has demanded that Greenwich Mean Time not be spoken of, as it implies England is the center of world culture. Instead, Coordinated Universal Time is now the preferred term, since it makes no reference to the existence of English culture. But Coordinated Universal Time is still based on the time in Greenwich, England! Changing GMT to CUT changes nothing except to replace an exact physical description with a PC euphemism. And what about "Zulu time"? The clock reading in Greenwich is abbreviated Z, which is pronounced "Zulu" in radio argot (like "whiskey" for W, "November" for N and so on). This means United States military communications commonly refer to Greenwich Mean Time as "Zulu time." How long until saying "Zulu" is deemed politically incorrect?

This [global time utility](#) can be useful, though beware it is only "accurate to within 0.3 seconds." Think such tiny amounts of time can't matter? In calibrating the GPS guidance devices of the bombs dropped on Iraq in March 2003, Air Force planners took into account not only the lag between when a GPS signal was transmitted from a satellite and received by a smart bomb -- far less than a second at the speed of light -- they took into account the effects of *relativity* on the signals, since time passes ever-so-slightly differently when the bomb accelerates by falling.

**Buck-Buck-Brawckkkkkkk No. 1:** Trailing 28-7 in the third quarter, the United States Saints punted on fourth-and-1. The Saints went on to lose 35-22.

**Buck-Buck-Brawckkkkkkk No. 2:** Trailing Jersey/A by 17-3, City of Tampa faced fourth-and-5 with 3:29 remaining. In trotted the punt unit. "This absolutely must be a fake," I said aloud. Boom goes the punt, and TMQ wrote the words "game over" in his notebook. There are three minutes left and you need two touchdowns, why are you punting???????



The Dreamliner's competitor, the new Airbus 350, has been a flop with airlines companies, which are not ordering the plane. Partly, this was because elements of the A350 design made nine-across seating impossible. In July, Airbus announced it will reengineer the 350 to allow nine-across seating. The reengineered Airbus 350 also gets a cabin three inches wider than the 787, meaning typical coach passenger receives an extra one-third of an inch of space. Airbus had the nerve to christen this new design the [A350 Xtra Wide Body](#). Wider by one-third of an inch -- live it up!

Note 1: If you saw the New York Times story saying Airbus was designing standing-room "seats" in which passengers actually would be strapped to boards, this story is not true, as the Multicolored Lady has since admitted.

Note 2: When you say "customer" for Boeing and Airbus, usually you don't mean the airlines themselves but little-known [International Lease Financing Corporation](#), owner of record for much of the world's commercial air fleet. International Lease Financing buys jetliners and leases them to American, United and so on, doing the paperwork in such a way that the depreciation can be shifted around in years when the airlines lose money and thus owe no taxes to claim deductions against. International Lease Financing, a subsidiary of scandal-plagued insurance giant AIG, is run by Steven F. Udvar-Hazy, the man who pioneered commercial jetliner leasing, then repaid his debt to the skies by donating \$65 million in seed money for the way-cool new air and space museum near Dulles Airport outside Washington, D.C. If you haven't been to this [museum](#), it is well worth the trip. But as TMQ continues to marvel, the official name of the place is the Steven F. Udvar-Hazy Center, including the middle initial. Oh, so you mean *that* Steven Udvar-Hazy.

Note 3: I don't mean to sound too harsh on the 787, which will use less fuel per passenger-mile and pollute less than any current jetliner, thanks to a light carbon-fiber composite fuselage and the advanced GENx turbofan from General Electric, a breakthrough in aviation engine design. (Though, good luck pronouncing "GENx.") Headroom and overhead bin room will increase; tiny windows, a common complaint about jetliners, will be supplanted by larger ones. I'm sure once the Dreamliner is airborne, savvy flyers will book it. Current airliner cabins are kept super-dry to reduce humidity in contact with the metal fuselage. A carbon-based fuselage means the Dreamliner will have normal cabin humidity, which passengers are sure to appreciate.

Today's jetliners are also pressurized not to ground level but to the equivalent of an altitude of about 8,000 feet. This is why your ears pop even inside a pressurized cabin, and why babies' ears hurt, making them cry. Pressurization to 8,000 feet reduces stress that causes metal fatigue on the fuselage -- at cruise altitude, the cabin is pushing outward against the hull with less force than if the pressurization mechanisms were simulating air pressure at the ground. With the 787's composite hull, fatigue shouldn't be an issue. The Dreamliner will be pressurized to near ground level, meaning no more popping ears and fewer babies crying. But this might prove a mixed blessing. The reason so many flyers slumber on airliners, even during turbulence, is that thin air makes you drowsy. People sleep well in mountain vacation cabins, and they sleep well at a simulated 8,000 feet. Aboard Dreamliners pressurized to near ground level, passengers might find that they can't sleep the flight away. Flights attendants might spend a lot more time racing to bring drinks to cranky, wide-awake people in 17-inch-wide



The Boeing 787 Dreamliner cabin mock-up. Use for comparison only. Your actual seat may be far smaller.

seats. Don't be surprised if airlines end up reducing pressurization aboard 787s, so the passengers fall asleep and don't complain about the lack of room.

Note 4: Boeing is recommending that all 787 engine housings be painted a single color. The company's studies show that the tiny ridges between paint shades in multiple-color airline liveries interrupt laminar airflow over engine nacelles, increasing fuel consumption by nearly 100 gallons per airliner per day. This is the level of detail that manufacturers already are working with to reduce petroleum consumption -- and the world still needs to get, what, maybe four or five times more energy-efficient?

**We're All Professionals Here:** Possessions for the Eagles at home against Jacksonville: punt, punt, punt, punt, downs, punt, end of half, punt, field goal, punt, field goal.

**Frontiers in Advertising:** This week General Electric is running television ads extolling its unpronounceable GENx. This might well be the best aviation engine ever manufactured, but what are the ads supposed to do, make you want to run out to the store and buy a high-bypass jet engine? In the Washington, D.C., subway system a few weeks ago, billboard ads appeared for the new 767-based tanker aircraft Boeing proposes building for the Air Force. Are the ads supposed to make subway riders want to run out and buy an aerial refueling fleet? Of course Boeing is trying to get Congress to fund its tanker program -- but members of Congress do not ride the subway.

**Best Blocks:** One thousand one, one thousand two, one thousand three, one thousand four, one thousand five, one thousand six, one thousand seven, one thousand eight. That's how many thousands I counted as Michael Vick scanned the field on third-and-5 in the fourth quarter, before finding Roddy White for the first-down catch that made possible the winning field goal against Cincinnati. On LaDainian Tomlinson's 38-yard touchdown run, an off-tackle right, LT/2 was touched once, when he was already 20 yards downfield. Mike Bell went into the end zone from close range standing up for Denver, and when you go in standing up on a goal-to-go play, that's good blocking. Julius Jones of Dallas was barely touched as he went straight up the middle for 14 yards for the key touchdown against Carolina, and Fred Taylor of Jax was barely touched on a simple straight-ahead touchdown. With Seattle leading 14-13 late in the second quarter, Kansas City faced third-and-5 and handed off to Larry Johnson, whose 7-yard run isn't the kind that makes highlight reels, but sustained the drive -- and benefited from beautiful blocking.

Note: Jones' run was an example of TMQ Law of the Other Shoe: When there's a bad turnover, the defense usually gives up a bad play on the next snap. Dallas scored to make it Cats 14, Cowboys 13 in the fourth quarter. Brad Hoover of Carolina fumbled the kickoff, and the other shoe fell when Dallas scored on the next snap. But wasn't Hoover's knee down before the ball popped out? Sure looked down to me. This is a common officiating error, to watch the scramble for the ball, not simply watch the knee, which can render moot the scramble for the ball.

**How Indianapolis Beat the Denver High School Defense:** The Broncos had given up two touchdowns in six games against a strong schedule, then surrendered four touchdowns to the Colts. Indianapolis scouted Denver well, and knew was it using a six-yard back-off for linebackers and cornerbacks, while most other teams place these players three to four yards off the ball. If the defense is backing off, why not throw under? That's what Peyton Manning did, endlessly throwing short passes in front of the Broncs' defenders. Even taking over on its 20 with 1:49 remaining, Indianapolis short-passed down the field for position for the winning figgie. Since the Colts like to run-run-run then deep strike, adjusting to the short pass showed flexibility on the part of Indianapolis coaches. Endlessly the Colts threw under the Bronco. They didn't drop the ball and remained patient despite the lack of big plays, which the Denver defensive set is unlikely to allow.

The Colts' sweetest play? Trailing 14-13, Indianapolis faced third-and-3 on the Denver 5. The Colts lined up with Reggie Wayne wide left, Dallas Clark in the slot left; corner Darrant Williams (who had a bad game) was across from Wayne and safety John Lynch across from Clark. At the snap, Wayne ran a quick post and Clark ran laterally into the area Wayne vacated. Both Williams and Lynch read this as a pick pattern to set up a hitch to Clark. Both went toward Clark, leaving Wayne uncovered for the touchdown.

**I Want My Midweek MAC!** One of TMQ's favorite aspects of the college football season is Tuesday and Wednesday night MAC games on ESPN. I love those midweek contests that don't involve megabucks top-20 schools, and yet provide excellent football, plus rockets on helmets. But here November is about to begin, college football is entering its home stretch, and still no midweek MAC on ESPN! Tomorrow night's card does offer Fresno State at Boise State, and midweek WAC and Mountain West games are fun too. But where, oh where, is the midweek MAC? Midweek games have been oddly few on ESPN this fall, doubly puzzling as football goes 24/7.

**Good Sportsmanship Report:** Mike Paulson of Canton, Mass., wrote, "I teach at Canton High, whose football team has not won a game in more than two years. A week ago Friday night we hosted North Attleboro High, an undefeated powerhouse school ranked in the state's top five. It was not surprising that at halftime, North Attleboro led 35-0. The second half was very different, the game ending with a final score of 35-13. Afterward I complimented our coach on a well-played second half. He explained that North Attleboro had dressed its junior varsity squad for the game and played JVs the entire second half." Congratulations to North Attleboro High coach Kurt Kummer for showing good sportsmanship. Note that when good sportsmanship is shown, everybody wins. North Attleboro got its victory; the team's junior varsity got some valuable game experience; Canton got the thrill of recording touchdowns against a ranked team. Had North Attleboro run up the score, everyone including the victors would have left the event with an empty feeling. Instead, everyone felt good about what transpired.

Michael Plowman of Dyer, Tenn., and the class of '94 at Gibson County High School, writes: "During my junior season we only had 17 players on our team. We were playing the highly ranked Union City Golden Tornadoes, third in the state at the time. We lost 41-0, but Union City coach Rick Barnes pulled his starters after the first series of the second quarter. Coach Barnes actively tried to avoid embarrassing us. His was the only hand of a coach I shook after a game all season." Michael, coach Rick Barnes earned your handshake!

Jason Dagle of Selinsgrove, Pa., wrote: "In the summer of 2004, the Southern Columbia High School team lost two players in a drowning accident at a football camp. That year en route to an undefeated season, the Tigers would only field nine players for their first play, to honor their lost friends. While a few teams tried to hit a big play against the Tigers' nine-man set, most opponents also fielded only nine players for the first play." In the 2004 Pennsylvania state Class A championship game, Southern Columbia sent out nine players for the first play, and opponent Rochester High responded by sending out only nine. Thus good sportsmanship was shown by Rochester High School and many other Pennsylvania high schools that year.

Tim Agnew of Omaha, Neb., wrote: "Outside Omaha there is a little high school called Mount Michael. For years in the 1970s and 1980s they had a dominant basketball team that won two state championships, coached by a man named Jim 'Killer' Kane. This nickname was more for the effort he coaxed out of his players than what he did to opponents. 'Killer' would NEVER allow his team to put up 100 points. If they managed to get ahead by a safe lead he would send in the subs, and if the subs reached 99 points he would have them purposefully turn the ball over to let the opponents score. Jim Kane, who died in 2003, was the Omaha World Herald Coach of the Year in 1983, is a

Nebraska Hall of Fame coach and recently the trophy for the best Nebraska high school basketball team was named after him. Kane constantly pushed his own players but also respected his opponents." Because of good sportsmanship he is warmly remembered, whereas bad-sport coaches are forgotten the instant they slink off.

Finally, Miraida Morales and Ashley Lane of Chicago were among many readers to point out the recent New York Times story about Cold Spring Harbor High of Long Island, N.Y., located in an affluent district, which raised \$45,000 so that crosstown rival Roosevelt High, from a low-income district, could keep its football program in operation.

Have another example of generosity or fair play at the high school or college level? Send it to me at [TMQ\\_ESPN@yahoo.com](mailto:TMQ_ESPN@yahoo.com).

**This Week's "Battlestar Galactica" Complaint:** Premise of "Galactica," Season 9: Finally arriving at Earth, Starbuck and Apollo buy a Los Angeles townhouse, only to have a bunch of Cylons move in next door. The Cylons are coming and going at all hours, holding loud parties and engaging in promiscuous relationships with gasoline pumps. In the season opener, Starbuck applies for a green card in order to work at a Starbucks, but is informed she must return to her planet of origin and enter the solar system legally.

**The Football Gods Chortled:** Carolina receivers dropped numerous passes, including a killer Keyshawn Johnson drop of a touchdown that would have given the Panthers a 21-10 lead. Two of Drew Brees' interceptions were well-thrown passes that bounced off his receivers' hands, while the Todd Heap touchdown pass that gave Baltimore a 28-7 lead bounced off the hands of a Saints' defender who should have intercepted. Sage Rosenfels would have finished with three touchdowns, no interceptions and perhaps the Houston starting job had not one perfectly thrown pass caromed off a receiver's hands for a pick. And the Jersey/A-Bucs game might have ended differently had not Tampa receivers dropped two Bruce Gradkowski touchdown passes. Note: Can you prove to me that Tiki Barber was the one playing running back for the Giants while Ronde Barber was the one playing corner for Tampa? C'mon, I dare you, prove it!

**From Romo to Zero to Hero:** Tony Romo sure looked good for Dallas. Just as good blocking instantly causes quarterbacks to become more talented, a mobile quarterback instantly causes offensive linemen to become better blockers. Strange playcalling by both teams' coaches hung over this game, however. Drew Bledsoe's interception disaster against the Giants came when Dallas coaches called a short square-out at the goal line, one of football's riskiest calls -- and did so mere weeks after Bledsoe had an interception disaster against the Eagles when Dallas coaches called a short square-out at the goal line. What did Dallas coaches call Sunday night at the goal line against the Panthers? Two short square-outs, one for a touchdown, one for an incompleteness that forced a field goal. Dallas coaches: If you keep calling the short square-out at the goal line, you will pay the price again.

As for Carolina, here is the Cats' next possession after Dallas recovered the fumble and jumped to a 21-14 lead: incompleteness, incompleteness, incompleteness, punt. There was 9:43 remaining when Carolina got the ball, why go into pass-wacky panic? Entering the fourth quarter with a 14-10 lead at home, Carolina proceeded to run the ball zero times: every play was a pass, resulting in an interception and a lost fumble on a sack. Bad enough that Carolina receivers dropped the ball multiple times. If you've got the lead and are at home and every fourth quarter snap is a heave-ho, you deserve defeat.

**Wacky Liqueur of the Week:** Jason Overby of Charleston, S.C., notes the Sicilian liqueur Cynar is an artichoke-based bitter. The [bottle](#) even has a picture of an artichoke on it. "Maybe this is the new way to get your daily serving of vegetables," Overby suggests.

**Adventures in Officiating:** "Get on the ground!" Twice TMQ yelled this toward Kansas City players. Chiefs leading 27-14, Kansas City lined up to attempt a field goal; the snap was bad; holder Dustin Colquitt should simply have gone to the ground, but instead scrambled and lost the ball, returned for a touchdown by Seattle. Later it's Kansas City 35, Seattle 28 at the two-minute warning. Defensive end Jared Allen intercepted a pass, and had he simply gone to the ground, the game for all intent and purpose would have ended. Instead he tried for a runback and Deion Branch of the Seahawks tomahawked the ball away from him. Get on the ground!

Now the officiating points. As Branch yanked the ball from Allen at the sidelines, he was in contact with Allen's out-of-bounds body. Didn't Branch touching an out of bounds Allen make the ball out of bounds and hence still Kansas City's? Rule 3, 20(b) says, "The ball is out of bounds when while in player possession, it touches a boundary line or anything other than a player or an official on or outside such a line." So you can be in contact with an out player and still be inbounds yourself. On the botched field goal, officials ruled that Colquitt fumbled. Watch the replay: This was one of human history's worst forward pass attempts, and thus should have been ruled an incompleteness, giving the Blue Men Group possession on the Seattle 39, rather than a touchdown.

**Parking-Lot Theory of Officiating:** In the waning seconds of the Jets at Browns' collision, Jersey/B trailed by a touchdown; tight end Chris Baker caught the fourth-down pass but his feet hit outside the end zone; officials said he was not pushed out. The push-out rule says the receiver gets the catch if he would have come down in bounds, were it not for a push. True, nobody can know what *might* have happened. But that sure looked to me like Baker might have landed inbounds if he hadn't been pushed! Maybe this is parking-lot thinking at work, since the game was at Cleveland. TMQ has long believed that officials at all levels of football are inclined to give the very last call to the home team -- because they are worried about being accosted in the parking lot on their way to their cars.

After the ruling ended the game, New England coaching alums Romeo Crennel and Eric "I Was a Teenaged Coach" Mangini hugged. There was enough weight in that hug to distort the local space-time continuum. Looks like they served the scrod fried, not baked, at the Patriots' training table! Note to Mangini: Going all-no-huddle worked a week ago because Detroit wasn't expecting it. On Sunday, Cleveland was expecting it.

**Obscure College Score of the Week No. 1:** Colby 10, Bates 7 in four overtimes. Located in Waterville, Maine, [Colby](#) "gives students a broad acquaintance with human knowledge." What about Klingon knowledge? What about the insights of the Cylon lesser poets? Sounds to me like Colby is guilty of anthropocentrism.

**Obscure College Score of the Week No. 2:** Black Hills State 17, Valley City State 0. Seven years into doing Obscure College Score of the Week, I still encounter colleges I've never heard of, and this week Valley City State is it. Located in Valley City, N.D., [Valley City State](#) says its campus is "one of the most attractive in North Dakota." The school offers three different majors in Exercise Science and Leisure Studies, one of which has a required course in [Walking and Jogging](#).

**Running Up the Score Watch No. 1:** TMQ's Law of the Obvious holds: Sometimes all a team needs to do is run up the middle for no gain, and things will be fine. At the start of the second quarter on Saturday, Texas Tech led Texas 21-0. For the remainder of the contest, Texas Tech threw 43 passes and ran nine rushes -- endlessly stopping the clock with incompleteness and leaving time

for Texas to win 35-31 in the fourth quarter. Yes, Tech has a pass-oriented philosophy. But Texas Tech coach Mike Leach also has a well-known obsession with running up the score. You can't help thinking that leading 21-0, Leach was more concerned with attempting to compile a spectacular final score, about which he could boast, than with simply winning the game. And the football gods come down hard on that sort of hubris.

**Running Up the Score Watch No. 2:** Reader Joe Bittner of San Jose, Calif., notes that over the past two seasons, Bowling Green relentlessly ran up the score on humble Temple, winning by a combined 140-23. Saturday, the football gods exacted vengeance as Temple snapped its 20-game losing streak by defeating Bowling Green.

**Reader Animadversion:** Got a complaint or a deeply held grievance? Write me at [TMQ\\_ESPN@yahoo.com](mailto:TMQ_ESPN@yahoo.com). Include your real name and the name of your hometown, and I may quote you by name unless you instruct me otherwise. Note: giving your hometown improves your odds of being quoted.

**Next Week:** Don't go pass-wacky with the political football -- get out and vote!

**Monday, November 6, 2006**

**Updated: November 10, 12:20 PM ET**

Dump injured reserve, please?

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By Gregg Easterbrook

At the halfway mark, injuries are clobbering NFL teams as usual. Mike Brown of Chicago, Dan Morgan of Carolina, Mike Peterson of Jax, Chris Simms of Tampa and other important players already have sustained injuries that sent them to injured reserve. Daunte Culpepper and other big-name players also soon might go on the IR list. The annoying thing is that even if the wounds to any players on injured reserve heal -- Simms might recover in as little as a few weeks -- they can't return, because being placed on injured reserve means you're done for the season. Those on injured reserve receive full pay for the season, but are forbidden to dress again that season regardless of whether they recover. Which raises the musical question: Why does injured reserve exist at all?

Injured reserve seems to have two functions: to force owners to pay players to do nothing, and to prevent fans from seeing players who sustained injuries, then recovered. Gentlemen on injured reserve still count against the salary cap, so teams get no financial benefit from moving them to the IR list. From the team's perspective, players are placed on injured reserve solely in order to open a roster spot for a healthy player. But why should there be any limit on roster spots? The salary cap governs how much NFL teams spend on players, and is imperative to keep high-revenue teams on a roughly even footing with low-revenue franchises. But limiting roster spots is unnecessary to ensure competitiveness. Right now the NFL roster limit is 53, and players with injuries get shunted to injured reserve so their precious spots can be assigned to someone else. But if a team wants to have 55 or 58 or 62 or 371 players on its roster, what difference does it make so long as the team observes the salary cap? (Note: 371 is how many players you could have, under the 2006 cap, if all were rookie free agents earning the league minimum salary.) The injured reserve system means that every season by Thanksgiving there are healthy NFL players who are paid in full but not allowed to play. It is hard to see how this benefits anyone: player, club or spectators.

Doing away with the roster limit -- but still enforcing the salary cap -- would permit the abolition of injured reserve. Hurt players would remain on the roster. If they recovered they would tape their ankles again, and if they did not they would keep sitting. Houston put running back Domanick Davis on IR just before the season started, unsure if he could play this season and feeling his roster spot was needed for someone else; Davis' health has improved, but he's forbidden to come back. When Indianapolis defensive tackle Monte Reagor got into an auto crash in mid-October, the Colts faced the dilemma of whether to place him on injured reserve, freeing a roster spot for someone else, or to keep him on the roster for a month or so while he recovers. The Colts chose to keep the hospitalized Reagor on the roster, meaning the team's defense has been shorthanded in practice since then. What possible good is accomplished by the existence of an injured reserve in such situations? So long as the Colts or Texans have salary cap space, why couldn't they keep Reagor or Davis on the roster while also signing extra free agents at their positions, to let the new guys practice and see if any of them have what it takes?

To understand why injured reserve exists, it is important to understand that the roster limit itself is a presalary-cap concept that has outlived its usefulness. Before the cap, which began in 1993, roster limits were essential -- otherwise the New York teams, Dallas, Washington and other rich franchises would have stockpiled huge rosters while Green Bay and Indianapolis had trouble

fielding a team at all. As recently as 1992, the league front office held an investigation of whether high-revenue teams essentially were redshirting young players by claiming they were injured when they weren't, then placing them on IR, circumventing the roster limit. The fear that rich teams were using injured reserve to beat the roster limit was one of the reasons the salary cap came into effect.

But now that the salary cap is here and working well, leveling the field regarding player spending, roster limits no longer are needed. There's no reason the Jets can't have 60 on the roster while the Packers have 56 and the Chargers have 63 and the Eagles have 54 and so on. Eliminating the roster limit would not result in big disparities, such as the Giants with 100 players and the Bills with 30, which might have happened if there were no roster limit and no salary cap. The salary cap prevents high-revenue teams from parking players on a bloated roster at the expense of low-revenue teams; this mechanism being in place, the roster limit has become a fossil.

College football has no roster limit, and the sun continues to rise while the Earth continues in its proper orbit. Because colleges don't pay players, in effect they have what TMQ advocates for the NFL -- no roster limit but equalized spending on players' salaries. (Equalized at zero in this case, but you get the idea.) The lack of a roster limit in college does not appear to have any impact on the competitive equation, but does insure that a player who is injured and then recovers can return. Brian Brohm is back for Louisville, for example, and college football fans are glad. If college had a roster limit, Brohm would have gone on injured reserve and would now be compelled to sit even though he's recovered.

That the rules force players on injured reserve to be paid for doing nothing is the larger version of the Free the Inactive Eight! problem TMQ writes about annually. Though 53 players are on the roster, before each NFL game seven or eight, depending on whether the team has a third quarterback, must be declared inactive. The inactives get full pay but watch from the sidelines. What does this accomplish other than forcing owners to pay players to twiddle their thumbs? The Inactive Eight actually make NFL play slightly lower in quality, by keeping off the field eight gentlemen who might contribute on special teams, and exiling to the bench the third quarterback, who might otherwise come in for trick plays. NFL coaches generally feel they can't risk the backup quarterback's health on trick plays, but the third quarterback would be another matter -- if he was allowed to come in.

Rosters limits and the inactive list are vestiges of the 1950s, when pro football was barely scraping by financially, many owners were tightwads and player relations were viewed in terms of old-fashioned labor-management confrontation. In the old system, some owners wanted to shaft players out of every last farthing, and fought for low roster limits in order to reduce salary outlays. An 11-man roster with everyone playing hurt both ways would have been the dream of some 1950s owners. Until 1973, the roster limit was 40, and antediluvian owners pressured to keep the limit low to hold down player costs. As the league became affluent and the limit gradually rose to 53, the antediluvian owner faction seemed to insist on injured reserve, the inactive list and the old "moves" system -- allowing a limited number of annual exchanges between the active roster and a temporary injury list -- as a way of preventing those uppity players from gaining increased employment.

Today the NFL is rolling in money, labor relations are constructive and all but two or three owners are happy to pay pretty much any amount to win a game. Still the inactive list and injured reserve, artifacts of a bygone era of money scarcity in pro sports, remain. Free the Inactive Eight! Abolish injured reserve! As of Friday there were 153 gentlemen on injured reserve across the league, an average of five players per club. Some of these men will be healthy again before the season ends, yet none will be allowed to don pads again until next season. Free the Injured Reserves! Let NFL teams have as many people on the roster as they please, so long as the salary cap is not violated.

In other football news, trailing 17-10, with 4:47 remaining, the Packers reached first-and-goal at the Bills' 1. Green Bay had rushed for an average of 4.9 yards per carry, against one of the league's weakest rush defenses. Thus if the Packers simply slammed the ball forward once or twice, the tying touchdown was nearly certain. Instead pass, interception run 76 yards the other way and the Bills scored the game-icing touchdown a few snaps later. What was going on? Brett Favre at that point needed 14 touchdown passes to take the NFL career record away from Dan Marino. Rather than make the high-percentage call to tie the game, the Packers' coaches seemingly made a call calculated to help Favre get the record. Shouldn't team needs come first? The complication is that in this disappointing Green Bay season, the Packers' faithful likely would rather see Favre get the career touchdown-pass record than win any particular contest.

In still more football news, everyone's asking whether Ben Roethlisberger bears all the blame for the defending champion Steelers' 2-6 start. For the second straight week, Roethlisberger launched a crazy interception in the red zone, heave-hoeing toward Champ Bailey when it was only Denver 14, Pittsburgh 7 with the ball on the Broncos' 14. Simply throwing the ball away would likely have led to a Steelers field goal. But perhaps the video game company Electronic Arts, not Roethlisberger, deserves the blame! Last August, I received this e-mail from reader Joe Bittner of San Jose, Calif.: "Just picked up the EA Sports game 'Coach.' On the cover is Bill Cowher. In recent history there has been a curse on the cover-boy players for the EA product, 'Madden NFL Football.' I am wondering if this curse will also be passed on to the game 'Coach' and if Cowher should be worried about having a terrible season."

In more football news, the guy who keeps making the spectacular plays for New Orleans, rookie receiver Marques Colston, was the 252nd pick in the draft, barely avoiding being Mr. Irrelevant. Reggie Bush was the second pick in the draft. To this point, Colston is hands-down New Orleans' Rookie of the Year.

In national news, it's Election Day. Stop reading Tuesday Morning Quarterback now, get out and vote, and finish reading later.

**Stat of the Week No. 1:** Since winning four consecutive postseason road games to clinch the Super Bowl, Pittsburgh has lost four consecutive road games.

**Stat of the Week No. 2:** Jacksonville has won three of its past four games, by a combined score of 91-13. In the other game, Jacksonville lost to Houston.

**Stat of the Week No. 3:** After going 0-7 against New England, Peyton Manning is now on a 2-0 run.

**Stat of the Week No. 4:** Chicago and Denver gave up a combined 42 points in their first seven home games and a combined 62 points in their next two.

**Stat of the Week No. 5:** There were three field-goal attempts to win -- two by Washington, one by Dallas -- in the final 35 seconds of the Cowboys-Redskins game.

**Stat of the Week No. 6:** J.P. Losman was sacked once every four times he dropped back, and Buffalo won.

**Stat of the Week No. 7:** Buffalo and San Francisco combined for 317 offensive yards, and both won.

**Stat of the Week No. 8:** Jon Kitna had a better passer rating this week than Brett Favre, Carson Palmer, Eli Manning and Tom Brady.

**Stat of the Week No. 9:** Since the moment he jogged out to be introduced at the Super Bowl last February, Ben Roethlisberger has thrown seven touchdown passes and 16 interceptions.

**Stat of the Week No. 10:** All teams in the NFC West, including 5-3 division leader Seattle, have been outscored.

**Cheerleader of the Week:** [Shamea of the Atlanta Falcons](#) is majoring in psychology, which means your lines will not work on her. According to her team bio, Shamea was a child actress in television commercials and danced in the movie "Drumline." Her favorite sport to participate in is flag football. Also, according to her team bio, her current reading list includes geology textbooks, and her favorite Atlanta player is T.J. Duckett -- um, who was traded.

**Sweet Play of the Week No. 1:** Ravens leading 7-0 after the first possession of the game, Cincinnati faced a third-and-12. Carson Palmer threw deep; Samari Rolle intercepted and returned 24 yards; under tackle, Rolle handed off to teammate Ed Reed, who ran 25 more yards for a touchdown. That made it Ravens 14, Bengals 0 with less than five minutes gone, and the visitors never recovered. Occasionally you see a lateral between defenders after a turnover -- in this case, Rolle executed a regular handoff.

**Sweet Play of the Week No. 2:** Denver leading Pittsburgh 14-10 at the start of the second half, the Broncos had a second-and-8 on their 28. Many NFL and college teams run an action in which a receiver fakes the end-around, but first the quarterback actually has handed off up the middle -- meaning when the quarterback fakes a handoff to the end-around, the quarterback's hands are already empty. Denver set this action -- then instead faked up the middle and gave the ball to Javon Walker coming around. Walker ran 72 yards for a touchdown, an unusually long rush by a receiver. As he was starting up the field, two-thirds of the Steelers' defense was still chasing the fake man in the middle.

**Sweet Play of the Week No. 3:** A while back TMQ asked who devised the play on which the quarterback fakes up the middle then backhand flips to the tailback running full speed outside. Reader Derek Falb of St. Louis reports this play was drawn up by Mike Martz for Marshall Faulk, and called Flip 90. The Redskins ran Flip 90 to Clinton Portis for a sweet looking 38-yard touchdown run. But what was up with Portis waving the ball for the final 10 yards? When you're 2-5, you should not be waving the ball.

**Sweet Play of the Week No. 4:** On Eli Manning's game-winning touchdown pass to Jeremy Shockey, the play-fake was so good that a Houston defender tackled running back Brandon Jacobs after Manning had cocked his arm to throw to Shockey.

**Sour Play of the Week No. 1:** Game scoreless, Indianapolis faced a second-and-goal on the New England 5. The Colts ran up to the line without a huddle; Marvin Harrison went in motion right; Harrison, who had already caught two touchdowns on quick slant passes on close-in downs this season, ran a quick slant; all New England's defenders totally ignored Harrison; touchdown. The Flying Elvii's Ellis Hobbs was near Harrison and simply stared at him. Endlessly TMQ marvels at how often the key aspect of a football play is that someone on the field does nothing at all. Hobbs did nothing as Harrison ran exactly the pattern any scout would expect him to run, and that was sour. "Man, they make that look easy," TMQ mumbled under his breath after the first two Indianapolis touchdowns.

**Sour Play of the Week No. 2:** Tampa might have fallen on hard times, but at least it still has the Tampa 2, the philosophy that two safeties deep makes long gainers rare. The United States Saints leading 7-0 and facing a second-and-14 on their 48, Devery Henderson ran the deep post and got behind everyone -- including the deepest Tampa safety, Will Allen -- for a touchdown that looked

so easy, Henderson jogged the final yards. And the Bucs weren't blitzing on the play, they were in their standard set. When Tampa's own Tampa 2 is giving up easy deep passes, you know the season is lost.

**Sour Play of the Week No. 3:** Game tied at 10 in the fourth, Buffalo faced a second-and-20 on the Green Bay 43. Lee Evans went deep against Packers corner Al Harris -- who made no attempt at all to cover his man, but rather stood there committing the high school mistake of "looking into the backfield" to guess the play. Evans caught the touchdown pass that proved to be the game's winning points. This play was double sour because not only was Harris taking the lazy man's way out by looking into the backfield, Buffalo quarterback J. P. Losman was *staring at Evans the entire time*.

**Sweet 'N' Sour Play:** Leading 7-0, Kansas City had a first-and-goal on the St. Louis 3. Damon Huard dropped back, no one covered tight end Tony Gonzalez on the quick turn-out, easy touchdown. That was sweet. But the play *wasn't a play-fake*, just a regular drop-back pass -- yet the entire Les Mouflons defense totally ignored the opponent's best red-zone receiver. That was sour.

**TMQ's Immutable Law Not Observed:** Tuesday Morning Quarterback's immutable law, Take One Till the Fourth, holds that unless a team is way behind, the 99 percent chance of a single PAT is better than the 40 percent chance of a deuce. Forget those "coach's cards" that say when to attempt one and when to go for two; Take One Till the Fourth, as the endgame scoring situation becomes clear. In the second quarter, Dallas scored a touchdown to make it Cowboys 6, Redskins 5; the "coach's card" says go for two when ahead by one, so Bill Parcells went for two. No joy, and oh how Parcells later wished for that point back. At the endgame, the score was tied at 19, and Dallas gained possession with 31 seconds remaining with Washington down to two timeouts. Had the Cowboys taken the single PAT earlier, they would have knelt twice, then jogged off the field victorious. Instead they had to gamble and perhaps you've heard the rest.

**Monday Night Football Professionalism Watch:** It was not exactly clairvoyance to predict Seattle would defeat Oakland. Nevertheless as the teams trotted onto the field for the coin toss, TMQ said aloud, "This game's over." The kickoff temperature was 62 degrees with rain and wind, and Raiders coach Art Shell came out enswathed in a ridiculous North Sea oil-rig worker's survival suit, while the high-aesthetic appeal Seattle Sea Gals came out in miniskirts and bare midriffs. Game over! Just in case there had been any doubt, it's the second quarter, Seattle leading 13-0. Oakland faces fourth-and-1 on the Blue Men Group 49. In trots the punt unit. I think, "This has got to be a fake." Boom goes the punt, and TMQ wrote the words "game over" in the notebook. You're 2-5, trailing by two touchdowns, have fourth-and-1 in opposition territory. Seventy-four percent of rushes on fourth-and-1 are successful. *Why are you punting on fourth-and-1 in opposition territory?* And now you are 2-6. Note: Just to prove it was no fluke, still trailing 13-0, Oakland punted again near midfield on fourth-and-1 in the third quarter, and still trailing 13-0 in the fourth quarter, punted *from the Seattle 39*.

**Nineteen People Steering 191,000 Tons:** If you've driven by a port recently, you know the shipping business has been taken over by container vessels whose holds and decks are stacked high with rectangular crates known in the trade as TEUs. In August the Danish shipping company A.P. Moller-Maersk christened the largest container vessel ever, the *Emma Maersk*. She is 1,300 feet long and displaces 191,000 tons. By way of comparison, the last of the *Nimitz*-class supercarriers, the *George H. W. Bush*, launched this fall, is 1,100 feet long and displaces 97,000 tons. Container vessels bigger than aircraft carriers drive down the price of shipping, keeping stores full of affordable goods. They also pose a challenge to the nation's bridges and dock facilities, as the dimensions of the largest commercial vessels are set to the width of canals and bridge-support spacing on their expected routes of service.

Here's what creeps me out about the enormous *Emma Maersk* -- her crew complement is 14. That's almost 14,000 tons of responsibility per crewmember. Shipping lines have been reducing crew complements relentlessly, to cut costs, and that does mean lower prices for consumer goods. It also means the 191,000-ton *Emma Maersk*, churning through the water at 25 knots and requiring miles to stop, has a couple people on the bridge, a couple people in the engine maintenance area and a couple people in the galley. Crews of newly built merchant vessels are supposed to do little more than monitor instruments, fight fires and send out a mayday if pirates attack, increasingly a threat in Asian seas. No matter how good the automated systems of modern ships might be, it seems inevitable there will come a time when a small crew is overworked or fatigued and someone makes a colossal error that results in a 191,000-ton boat slamming into something. Bear in mind Germany's max-tech, cost-no-object magnetic train prototype, which was designed to save money via automated operation, just slammed into something, killing 23 people -- and that train operated on a dedicated line without any other traffic. Giant container ships and oil tankers with minimal crews operate in busy waters where there are many other ships moving unpredictably, plus bridges and underwater obstacles. The momentum of the *Emma Maersk* would be more than sufficient to, say, bring down the Golden Gate Bridge.

Because merchant ship crews are now usually small, many sailors are expected to be on duty pretty much round-the-clock, increasing the chance of a fatigue blunder. Merchant vessels increasingly also are expected to sail straight through the center of storms, to cut delivery time. The situation is worst for bulk transport ships that carry wheat, potash and so on. Because the cargo of a "bulky" is worth less pound-for-pound than the cargo of a container ship, shipping companies tend to understaff bulkies, use marginally trained crews, and demand such ships take risks with rough seas. Bulkies have sunk in the blue water with disturbing frequency in recent years, and no one seems to care so long as Wal-Marts are stocked with inexpensive goods. I commend to readers the excellent 2004 book "The Outlaw Sea" by William Langewiesche, which describes in harrowing detail how the ocean transport industry cuts corners and mistreats sailors.

**Chicago Ming Ding Xiong ("Bears Whose Outcomes Are Decided by Fate" in Chinese) Might Be Facing More Fate Than They Wish:** Don't look now, but Chicago has 17 giveaways, one of the worst figures in the league -- only San Francisco, Cleveland, Oakland and Pittsburgh, all well south of .500, have more giveaways. Chicago might be 7-1, but it's not going far into January if it can't hang on to the ball. On Sunday the Bears appeared careless and clumsy against a 1-6 team, and this just two games after looking careless and clumsy against Arizona, then 1-4. Carelessness was epitomized by the Jason Taylor interception return. Miami had just scored to go ahead 7-3 in the second quarter; the Bears had a first-and-10 on their 23, and Rex Grossman threw it right into Taylor's hands. Sure Grossman was under pressure -- so take the sack! Meanwhile Taylor did not trick Grossman by dropping into coverage on the play, as sports-yak types said. Taylor lined up at defensive end and rushed. As the pocket collapsed, Bears tight end Desmond Clark ran into the right flat for the safety-valve pass. Taylor noticed, chased Clark and cut in front.

**Savage Negative Ads Distort Record of "None of the Above":** Every recent election season has seen negative political advertising sink to a new low, and this fall, once again, new lows were reached. [This nonpartisan Web site](#), sponsored by the University of Pennsylvania, washes the mud off both party's ads. [Here National Public Radio offers video](#) of some of the worst ads of the election season. Bad enough that negative advertising diminishes the quality of political debate; it also turns people off to voting, as Diana Mutz of the University of Pennsylvania has argued.

This year some negative ads seem to make no attempt at all to characterize politicians' positions accurately. For instance, the Michael J. Fox ad attacking Republican Maryland senatorial candidate

Michael Steele makes it seem Steele opposes all stem cell research. Steele opposes research on *embryonic* stem cells, not on other types of stem cells; there's a big difference, and surely Fox knows that well. [Here Jacob Weisberg of Slate](#) argues that on balance, Republican attack ads are more irresponsible than Democratic attack ads. Weisberg notes, for example, that one Republican ad attacking the Democratic contender in an Arizona congressional contest said she had been "president of the ACLU." She had never been any kind of ACLU officer -- rather, she had once taken a legal case involving the organization.

The most offensive attack ad of the season is the "Harold, Call Me" spot run by the Republican National Committee against Democratic Senate candidate Harold Ford Jr. of Tennessee. The woman who declares in the spot, "I met Harold at a Playboy party" has, in fact, never met Harold -- she's an actress reading lines. All the people who give opinions about Ford in the commercial, presented as men and women on the street, are actors. That is to say, the commercial consists *exclusively* of lies. You can't go any lower. The ending lie is especially repellant on the part of the Republican National Committee, as viewers are not warned that the person presented as knowing the candidate personally actually has never met him. Ken Mehlman, the hack who runs the Republican National Committee, appears beyond shame. But there are lots of responsible, admirable people in Republican politics. Why have they allowed the Republican National Committee to descend so low?

Attacks ads have been heated on both sides in the Virginia senatorial race, where sitting Republican senator George Allen, son of the football coach, is struggling to hold off Democratic challenger James Webb, former secretary of the Navy under Ronald Reagan. Here, based on this race, is Tuesday Morning Quarterback's quadrennial take on the state of political advertising:

### **REPUBLICAN ATTACK AD**

*Soft, lilting female voice. Because voters worry that Republicans are too right-wing, the voice-over in Republican attack ads is always a sweet, reasonable-sounding woman.*

"Did you know that Jim Webb reads novels? That he thinks about sex? Jim Webb has never denied thinking about sex! Jim Webb has been known to receive money. The exact amount of money he has received has never been disclosed! Many drug dealers drive their cars on highways, and Jim Webb drives his car on highways. So what's the difference between Jim Webb and a drug dealer? While serving in the Vietnam War, Webb frequently used profanity, and is rumored to have thought about sex. When five brave firefighters died trying to stop the California wildfire, Jim Webb did nothing to rescue them -- nothing! As a Democrat, Jim Webb advocates mandatory homosexuality, tax-funded Cadillacs for welfare recipients, the abolition of religion, surrendering our country to the United Nations and letting Saddam Hussein out of jail on a technicality. If Jim Webb is elected, Osama bin Laden will be placed in control of the United States military. Why won't Jim Webb release the details of his thoughts?"

### **DEMOCRATIC ATTACK AD**

*Booming, macho voice. Because voters worry that Democrats are too squishy, the voice-over in Democratic attack ads always sounds like a steroid-swilling bodybuilder.*

"Maybe George Allen is no longer a Satan-worshipper, but many Satan-worshippers are skilled at hiding their true allegiance. The postman, the school principal -- can you be sure they are not Satan worshippers? Can you be sure George Allen is not? As a Republican, George Allen favors mandatory pregnancy, nuclear war against Canada, and the resumption of the Atlantic slave trade. George Allen never has explained adequately where he was on May 23, 1983. Investigators have found many documents related to George Allen. George Allen has been observed leaving meetings.

Some of these meetings occurred in private! If George Allen is re-elected, major oil companies will charge for gasoline. George Allen has never denied that George W. Bush is President of the United States. George Allen, George Bush. Powerful insiders don't want you to know that both have the same first name!"

**Jags' Fan's Dream Battery -- Garrard to Wilford:** David Garrard is 6-1 as the Jacksonville starter. Jacksonville is 7-1 in games in which Ernest Wilford catches a touchdown pass.

**Why Tactics Matter No. 1:** All football commentators, including TMZ, have praised Bill Belichick so much, praising him further seems repetitious. But on Sunday, the Patriots actually had a bad game plan. The Colts arrived at 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 with the worst rushing defense in the league, while the Pats arrived with red-hot tailback Laurence Maroney. Yet New England called 35 passing plays and 33 rushes. Going pass-wacky led Tom Brady to suffer a four-pick night.

One interception was not Brady's fault, bouncing off the hands of the receiver. But the others were, including a nutty heave-ho into triple coverage around Ben Watson. The Watson pass seemed especially odd because New England had a first-and-10 on the Indianapolis 40 with 28 seconds remaining in the first half, trailing by a field goal. Given the clock, two Colts safeties were lined up 25 yards deep when the play started. How could Brady have seen how deep the safeties were and thought he could throw deep? Anyway, if New England had rushed more, Brady might not have been trying to heave-ho into coverage.

**Why Tactics Matter No. 2:** Detroit led 10-7, but Atlanta had just stopped a Lions' fourth-and-1 attempt from the Falcons' 2, and you figured that would swing the momentum back to the favorite. Michael Vick dropped back from his own 4, danced around in the pocket, saw a rusher approaching and zinged the ball directly into the hands of Detroit's Dre Bly. Interception, the Lions score a touchdown on the next snap, and the upset was on in earnest. But why was Vick standing there in the pocket in his own end zone? In recent weeks Vick has been a hot passer, and part of the reason is the Falcons have been using a high-school-inspired offense in which they run, run, run and then play-fake and have Vick sprint out. Please don't tell me a few weeks of success with this back-to-basics approach has convinced the Falcons' coaches that Vick is now a refined, classic passer. On Sunday at Ford Field, Vick did too much standing up straight in the pocket, and the result was more interceptions than touchdown passes.

**News from the Edge of the Universe:** The Infrared Space Observatory satellite, operational from 1995 to 1998, sent back so much data that some is only now being analyzed. Recently, researchers studying ISO data logs said they had detected, in very deep space, the formation of stars with [100,000 times the luminosity of our sun](#). The discovery is a serendipitous result of a clever idea by a German researcher named Dietrich Lemke. Operators had programmed the ISO satellite to "slew" its instruments from one point in the heavens to another, in order to collect data on locations that various scientists had deemed promising. Lemke realized that ISO was doing nothing while re-pointing itself, and asked that the cameras simply be left on during that process; the resulting incomprehensible streams of data were dumped in his and some colleagues' laps. Looking at countless blurry images, Lemke and others had a eureka moment when they came across [this](#). Now it may turn out these ultra luminous suns are ISO's major discovery -- extremely bright stars have been seen before, but these are the first images of such stars forming.

Cosmologists have begun using other telescopes to study the region, trying to imagine what conditions could lead to the formation of objects so big and so bright they defy standard theories of stellar creation. Of course, everyone's assuming the objects Lemke discovered are natural. Readers of TMQ know what when astronomers produce evidence of puzzling events in deep space, such as very powerful gamma-ray bursts, and then astronomers say they are at a loss to explain what natural process could cause the phenomena, TMQ wonders if what we are really seeing is the muzzle flashes of cataclysmic weapons built by advanced civilizations. What if, in these new images from the ISO satellite, we are witnessing the engineering shakedown trials of an extremely advanced artificial power source?

**News From the Edge of the Solar System:** In September, the Cassini spacecraft in orbit around Saturn took [this magnificent photograph](#) of Saturn eclipsing Sol. The camera was facing back toward the inner solar system, so the sun is behind the ringed planet. Look closely at the 10 o'clock position relative to Saturn's disk, and just inside the outermost ring. The little dot you see is -- Earth.

**Wacky Food of the Week:** At Soleil in Palo Alto, Calif., TMQ was confronted by a dish containing "xerez infused crimini mushrooms." I went to Google and typed in "define xerez." Nothing! And it took Google 0.44 seconds to find no definition, which is practically slow at this point.

**Freeze! Keep Those Press Releases Where I Can See Them!** The sole item of bipartisan consensus in the current Congress has been the stern insistence of both Republican and Democratic leadership that the FBI was wrong to raid the office of Rep. William Jefferson, seeking evidence of bribes. Since the Constitution confers special status on the legislative papers of members of Congress, there was a legal issue. But what do you suppose the real reason was that Democratic and Republican members of Congress united in opposition to the FBI raid -- concern over separation-of-powers doctrine? Republican and Democratic members of Congress alike agree they don't want the Justice Department investigating bribes to members of Congress.

Related point: Jodi Rudoren and Aron Philhofer of the New York Times recently reported that 1,421 state and local governments have hired Washington lobbyists, who in 2004 spent \$110 million on lobbying in order get more than \$60 billion designated as "earmarks," or special budget favors to specific places or programs. That is to say, \$110 million in state and local tax money was expended to divert \$60 billion in federal tax money -- most of which came from people who live in states and cities, state and local taxpayers being the sources of most federal taxes. To get these favors, state and local governments hire as lobbyists former members of Congress or former congressional staffers, who then use their insider status to fleec the taxpayer. This is a classic "sliver strategy" -- Congress hands out \$60 billion in favors so that cronies of members of Congress can rake in \$110 million in lobbying fees. Because what goes directly into the cronies' pockets is only a small sliver of the overall waste, the sliver goes unnoted. I bet there is bipartisan consensus that Republicans and Democrats alike both don't want this investigated, either!

Wouldn't taxpayers come out way ahead if the salaries of members of Congress were raised to, say, \$1 million per year, but in return all forms of outside income were banned for senators and representatives while retired members were permanently banned from lobbying? Raising congressional salaries to \$1 million per year would cost the federal taxpayer \$535 million -- a bargain compared to \$60 billion in earmarks and other wasteful spending that Congress approves for reasons of cronyism.

**Washington, D.C. -- Nov. 7:** Former president Jimmy Carter leads a team of international observers that will monitor elections in the United States today. Observers from Nicaragua,

Guatemala, North Korea, Mexico, Congo, Nigeria, Pakistan and the West Bank will watch polling places for signs of fraud or suppression of the vote. In recent years, Carter has led many international teams to monitor elections in fledgling democracies plagued by voting scandals. This is Carter's first election-monitoring mission to the United States itself. International observers wearing blue armbands will be stationed at polling places across Florida, Ohio, Illinois and Nevada. "We hope to help the American people vote freely and see their votes counted," Nicaraguan team member Daniel Ortega told the Associated Press. Observation team member Olusegun Obasanjo of Nigeria said, "Once America learns to hold elections without irregularities, further intervention by the international community should no longer be necessary."

**Best Blocks:** Only one defender touched LaDainian Tomlinson on his 41-yard touchdown run, and no defender touched Tomlinson on his 7-yard, off-tackle touchdown rush that put the pretty-in-powder-blue Chargers ahead for good against Cleveland. It's pretty fun to run for touchdowns in powder blue when everyone ahead of you has already been knocked to the ground. On Larry Johnson's early run for 45 yards against St. Louis, no defender touched the Kansas City tailback until he had gained 40 yards. And that run came on third-and-9 from the Kansas City 2 -- a passing down, meaning there were plenty of extra secondary types on the field for the Rams, and all were blocked. Pulling guard Brian Waters and tight end Tony Gonzalez got the monster blocks on the play. And Deuce McAllister walked in standing up for the 3-yard touchdown that put the game away for New Orleans against City of Tampa. Whenever a running back goes in standing up at the goal line, the blocking was fine.

**"Peace on Earth," Copyright United Nations:** The United Nations now has a marketing slogan and [claims copyright](#) control over its materials. Wait, wasn't the whole point of the United Nations that it belonged to everyone?

**At Happy Hour in Hell's Sports Bar, Well Drinks Are 99 Cents and Top Shelf Is Only \$2 -- But the Line Takes an Eternity:** Hell's sports bar has 28 wide-screen plasma TVs, and on Sunday all were showing San Francisco 9, Minnesota 3 in a game without any touchdowns. For the highlight program, all 28 screens in Hell's Sports Bar showed nothing but, over and over, Terrell Owens dropping the winning pass and then, after the game, being interviewed about his complaints about not getting the ball enough.

**The Dogs Have Their Day:** The four bye teams of Week 8 -- Buffalo, Detroit, Miami and Washington -- were 6-22 coming into Sunday. All won.

**We're All Professionals Here No. 1:** Minnesota's possession results against San Francisco: field goal, fumble, punt, punt, interception, punt, fumble, downs.

**We're All Professionals Here No. 2:** Reaching first down in Seattle territory in the first quarter, Oakland surrendered sacks on three consecutive downs.

**Huh? What?** Scoring to make it San Francisco 6, Minnesota 3 in the second quarter, the Niners onside-kicked and recovered. Three snaps later, the Squared Sevens faced fourth-and-1 on the Minnesota 47 -- and punted. So Nolan the Younger was willing to take a relatively long-shot gamble with a surprise onside kickoff, but then, *on the same possession*, not willing to take a likely-to-succeed gamble on fourth down in opposition territory.

**Wacky Beer of the Week:** The tastefully named Gregg Liddick of Athens, Ga., notes a Georgia brewery is offering a coffee-and-stout drink intended to be [consumed at breakfast](#). Note that the beer is 8.1 percent alcohol, roughly double the usual content of beer. Have one of these for breakfast and your plan better be to go straight back to bed.

**Dear, the Garage Enhancement Truck Is Here:** Recently TMQ included an item about fancy garage appliances as the new frontier in suburban acquisitiveness. How soon, I asked, until garage renovation strikes? Answer: not long! Many readers, including Jayne Mulholland of Charleston, S.C., alerted me to this new company, Premiere Garage, which calls itself "The Leader in Garage Enhancement." Let's hope that's natural garage enhancement! Check the company's photos, which showcase [spotless garages](#) unlike any that have ever existed in human history. These garages remind you of car ads that feature a guy in a convertible roaring down the open road with not one single other vehicle anywhere for miles around. The Premiere Garage FAQs page has this exchange:

"Q. My garage is full of stuff. What do we do with it while the floor is being coated?"

"A. It is the homeowners' responsibility to remove all possessions from the garage."

**Worst Crowd Reaction:** The New England crowd lustily booed Adam Vinatieri when he returned to Foxborough as a member of the Colts. All Vinatieri did was win three Super Bowls for New England! All three were decided by a field goal, remember. And Vinatieri left after receiving only a perfunctory offer from Patriots management, which didn't want the kicker back. Booing your former homeboy when departure was not his idea was pretty classless, New England fans. And speaking of class ...

**"Class" and "Cheapskate" Both Begin with "C":** Drew Bledsoe may have taken a seat for good, but recall that when he was traded by New England in 2002, Bledsoe bought a full-page ad in the Boston Globe to thank the team's fans for cheering for him. When Daunte Culpepper was traded by Minnesota in 2006, he sent the team's fans an e-mail.

**Obscure College Score of the Week:** La Verne 21, Claremont-Mudd-Scripps 14. The defeated team is a consortium of Claremont McKenna College, Harvey Mudd College and Scripps College. Three schools combined and they still couldn't beat La Verne! Located in La Verne, Calif., the University of La Verne offers a College of Education and Organizational Leadership that confers a doctorate in education. Read [this page](#) that describes the doctorate in education program and see how many grammatical errors you can find.

**Bonus Obscure College Score:** Worcester Polytechnic Institute 46, Mount Ida 20. Located in Newton, Mass., Mount Ida College lists a [Top 10 reasons](#) to attend. One is "the college is easily accessible from major highways."

**Obscure College Basketball Score:** California of Pennsylvania, a Division II team booked by powerhouse University of Maryland for an easy rout, instead came within a point of upsetting the Terrapins. The California of Pennsylvania is known as the Vulcans, University of Maryland basketball is the program that's allergic to education -- a miserable 18 percent graduation rate for the men's team. Perhaps Maryland simply couldn't handle a basketball offense based on pure logic! In football, next Saturday is TMQ's Obscure College Game of the Year -- Indiana of Pennsylvania at California of Pennsylvania.

**Running Up the Score Watch:** Two weeks ago TMQ took another shot at Pittsburg of Kansas, college football's worst offender at running up the score -- in 2004, on the way to the highest-scoring season in college football history, the Gorillas faked a punt when leading 63-7. I noted that Pittsburg of Kansas had relentlessly run up the score on its weakest opponents this season, winning one game 87-0 and another 63-20. I pointed out that not only is running up the score bad sportsmanship, but also such little-bully behavior makes you psychologically weak, and you fold when confronted with an equal opponent. Following its record 2004 regular season, the Gorillas lost the Division II championship to Valdosta State of Georgia. "Presumably when Pittsburg of Kansas

meets a real opponent it will collapse as usual," TMQ wrote of this year's iteration. As noted by many readers, including Ian Carlson of Maryville, Mo., Pittsburg of Kansas met Northwest Missouri State on Saturday at Arrowhead Stadium and collapsed as usual, losing 41-14.

**November's Biggest Jerk in Sports:** Once your columnist lived in Chicago, and besides the pizza and theater scene, what was great about the Windy City was that just when you thought that every conceivable form of civic corruption imaginable to the human mind had already been tried, you would pick up the morning newspaper and learn on the front-page news of a new, entirely original type of graft. Similarly, one might think every type of bad sportsmanship has already been tried. You might think that until you [read this](#). In a front-page story in the Washington Post, Timothy Dwyer reports on a youth football league commissioner who fired a team's coach, on the eve the playoffs, because the coach failed to play the commissioner's son exactly as the commissioner demanded. How could the commissioner get away with this firing? Many youth leagues are not affiliated with any county, school system or accrediting body, and are essentially the private fiefdoms of their commissioners. Reader Darren Rusakiewicz of Odenton, Md., wrote, "I had to read this article twice before I really believed what this guy did. Are there any words stronger than 'reprehensible' to describe this chump?" The bad sport's name is Dan Hinkle, and reading this story I thought, first, Dan Hinkle is an astonishing jerk; second, imagine being his son, exposed to general ridicule because of a jerk father. The son's team's seemed ruined, but nobly so. All the other players refused to participate in the playoff game after their coach was fired. So ESPN salutes the middle-school boys of the South County Raptors: boys, you showed admirable good sportsmanship, while the adults around you were letting you down. As for the commissioner of the South County Association of Fairfax County, Va., there's no need to wait until the end of the month -- Dan Hinkle is TMQ's Biggest Jerk in Sports for November. Good sportsmanship footnote: The Fairfax County Youth Football League, also private, just arranged for the South County Raptors to play a "bowl game" against its champion, and the fired coaches will be the ones to coach.

**Reader Animadversion:** Got a complaint or a deeply held grievance? Write me at [TMQ\\_ESPN@yahoo.com](mailto:TMQ_ESPN@yahoo.com). Include your real name and the name of your hometown, and I may quote you by name unless you instruct me otherwise. Note: Giving your hometown improves your odds of being quoted.

**Next Week:** The United Nations sues YouTube for copyright infringement.

**Wednesday, November 8, 2006**

TMQ Nation fires back

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By Gregg Easterbrook

An item Tuesday expressed dismay that the new Emma Maersk, the world's largest container ship -- nearly twice the displacement of a Nimitz-class supercarrier -- has a crew complement of just 14. Many English readers, including **Dorothy Wickersham of Windsor**, pointed out that the Emma Maersk just made port of call at Felixstowe, in the United Kingdom, [on her maiden voyage](#) -- and arrived with a crew of 13. It's only her first voyage and already this mega-gigantic vessel is understaffed!

**Tom Herman of Louisville, Ky.**, writes, "I am a University of Kentucky fan and was invited by a friend to see them play Georgia. Saturday was cool in Lexington -- about mid-40s, but sunny. As an avid TMQ reader, I made sure to notice the dress of both cheerleading squads to see whether they displayed their courage -- and skin -- by braving the elements. At the start, cheerleader professionalism was equal. The female cheerleaders of both squads wore traditional fall outdoor cheerleading outfits with short skirts, while the men wore short-sleeved shirts and long pants. Georgia, a touchdown favorite, led 14-10 at the half. During the second half, clouds rolled in, blocking the sun and making the stadium chillier. Sometime during the third quarter, the female Bulldog cheerleaders donned track suits. I quickly looked down the sidelines to the opposite end of the field and noted approvingly that the Wildcat cheerleaders had no need of a costume change and were continuing to cheer in miniskirts. I pointed this out to my friend and noted that it was a good omen. Sure enough, the Blue and White promptly came back, beating Georgia 24-20 -- their first victory in the series in nine years. Some will say that this was due to Georgia having a down year, but thanks to TMQ, I know the real reason was the professionalism shown by our cheerleaders."

TMQ worried when encountering "xerex-infused mushrooms" on a trendy restaurant menu and being able to find no definition of "xerex." **Laura Barbero-Buffa of Panama City, Panama**, writes, "Don't panic, Xerez is another way of spelling Jerez, which is Spanish for sherry. So the trendy restaurant was just trying to find a more expensive-sounding way to say their mushrooms are soaked in sherry!" **Ankoor Biswas of Chicago** adds, "Xerez is a former name of Jerez de la Frontera, a city in southern Spain. Sherry wine was originally produced in this town, and got its name from the city -- which the Persian founder named after the Shiraz wine of Iran. So xerez is essentially the name for sherry produced near the Jerez de la Frontera region in Spain, and I suppose you're allowed to infuse your champignon with xerez, although that doesn't sound so appetizing to me. I knew all this because there's a Spanish second division soccer club named Xerez CD. Every once in a while it pays to be an American following international soccer."

TMQ noted that La Verne University had beaten Claremont-Mudd-Scripps, a consortium of three schools unable to defeat just one.

**Bryan Quevedo of Astoria** countered, "Thank you for featuring my alma mater, Claremont McKenna College, and its sports team on the Obscure College Score of the Week. But at the contest



Kentucky's cheerleaders clearly made the difference against Georgia.

it was the combined force of two schools, not three, that lost to La Verne. You see, one member of the consortium, [Scripps](#), is a college for women. While the three schools fall under one umbrella for sports, the men's and women's teams have [different mascots](#). Men's teams (with no Scripps students) play as the Stags, while the women's teams (which include Scripps) compete as the Athenas." **Alejandro Gonzalez**, another Claremont McKenna alum, added, "Our cross country team have shirts that say Claremont-Mudd-Scripps, Nerd Is Our Middle Name." Wait, Mudd is your middle name!

**Sarah Myksin of Middletown, Conn.**, reports, "New England fans did cheer for Adam Vinatieri when the Colts first ran on the field. He came out before the rest of the team, and he was applauded. It was only when he came onto the field to kick that he got booed." **Mary Kay of New Orleans** protests, "I was surprised you didn't mention Sean Payton's good sportsmanship by not scoring on Tampa late in the fourth after a turnover deep in Tampa territory. A final of 38-14 would have looked more impressive on the scoreboard but what Payton did is more impressive because it was the right thing to do." New Orleans got the ball at the Tampa 4 with 2:03 remaining and knelt four times, though this gave possession back to the Bucs with 30 seconds left; Jon "Once I Was A Teenage Coach" Gruden repaid the gesture by calling two off-tackle runs. Congratulations on sportsmanship all around! Meanwhile **Matthew Freitas of Modesto, Calif.**, maintains the football gods punished Chicago for keeping starters on the field in the second half when leading San Francisco 41-0 by sending the Bears down to defeat against Miami.

**Sean Sutton of Ypsilanti, Mich.**, writes, "In response to the reader who asserted the BCS system requires a team to run up the score, I would direct your attention to the number-two team in the nation, the University of Michigan. Michigan has compiled its ranking by simply playing top-notch, fundamental football while beating opponents by reasonable margins. The coaches frequently put in substitutes late in games they're winning, most frequently replacing their Heisman-contender Mike Hart who would benefit from the added stats, and run late in the game to kill the clock without embarrassing their opponents. Michigan exemplifies many TMQ tenants in general: the coaches have called 347 rushes to only 247 passes (including sacks and quarterback scrambles as called passing plays), they do not blitz heavily, they go for it on fourth-and-short in the Maroon Zone, and they are content to burn the clock late in the game."

**Wayne Croston of Victorville, Calif.**, an engineer with GE Aviation, reports that the impressive but weirdly named new GENx jet engine is pronounced by saying each individual letter: "GEE-EEE-EN-X". As in, "Hey Ralph, did you check the pressure in that GEE-EEE-EN-X?" **Jerry Noble of Portland, Ore.**, countered, "Is it just me that when trying to pronounce the new jet engine named GENx that it comes out JINX? Methinks this is not a very good name for a jet engine."

Of sleep and aircraft cabins, **Dr. Tonya Wren of Greenville, S.C.**, writes, "As part of my residency training, I spent a month at Copper Mountain, Colorado. Since the base of the mountain is nearly 10,000 feet above sea level, we saw plenty of acute mountain sickness or AMS, in addition to ski and snowboard injuries, of course. One key symptom of AMS is insomnia. People may be drowsier due to thin air, but do not sleep well. When a person sleeps, he or she doesn't breathe as deeply or as often. If there isn't as much oxygen around, such as at high altitude, blood oxygen levels drop during sleep. This triggers numerous waking episodes times throughout the night, resulting in poor sleep. From my experience, I sleep on airplanes because I have gotten up early after staying up late packing the night before, and sitting on a plane is the first moment of real rest I've had in a while."



We could do without AMS right now.

TMQ's proposed law of Fair Play on Points held that a team should stop trying to score if ahead by 40 points in the third quarter and 30 points in the fourth quarter. Many readers, including **Melissa Manchester of Huntington Beach, Calif.**, asked: Since Northwestern blew a 38-3 lead, and the old Houston Oilers once blew a 35-3 lead, and the Seahawks were recently ahead 42-3 only to have the game end 42-30, why ever stop trying to score? Here's why. Hundreds of thousands of major-college games have been played in the last half-century (that is, since the forward pass became popular), and only once has a team with a lead of 35 points or more failed to win. Tens of thousands of NFL games have been played in the same period, and only once has a team with a lead of 32 points or more failed to win. Maybe it would be possible to lose a 40-point third-quarter lead, and a comet might strike the field, too. My proposed leads are insurmountable, so long as the leading team plays the percentages and grinds the clock.

TMQ wondered if PC forces would insist the military stop referring to universal time as "Zulu time," after the radio-traffic phonetic word for the letter Z. **Lieutenant Commander Keland Regan of the United States Navy**, who has taught navigation at the Naval Academy, writes, "If they will ever do away with Zulu time, this would throw the phonetic alphabet into a tailspin. Next Oscar the Grouch would be demanding a change for the letter O and bourbon makers would demand the Bravo for B be changed to Bourbon to offset having W called Whiskey." Then I complained about good old GMT being replaced by universal time. If Greenwich Mean Time was good enough for Admiral Nelson it should be good enough for the space shuttle!



Our technology has improved considerably from the days of the astrolabe.

**Greg Hatten, a GPS specialist at Schriever Air Force Base in Colorado**, counters, "Universal Time Coordinated, or UTC, has replaced Greenwich Mean Time because atomic frequency standards [i.e. atomic clocks] have supplanted astronomical measurements. Once, astronomers at the Greenwich Observatory measured the time of local noon -- that is, when the sun was at its zenith. Since sailors relied on longitude calculations from this observatory, it was natural to call the reference Greenwich Mean Time. Precise time is no longer

calculated from solar observations. The new UTC has inputs from 58 timing laboratories all over the world, ranging from Warsaw to Bangkok. Each laboratory contributes a percentage of the master clock interpretation according to its sophistication and stability [read: price tag]. The United States, including the National Institute of Standards and Technology in Boulder and the U.S. Naval Observatory, is the biggest contributor to the computation, at 36 percent. UTC in turn is calculated by the International Bureau of Weights and Measures in Toulouse. So UTC has a historical connection to Greenwich, but is calculated in France with contributions from all over the world, and the biggest contributor is America." Should we call it Toulouse Mean Time? Boulder Mean Time? Here is [a backgrounder on the new time calculation system](#). And here is a haiku:

*GMT is dead.*

*Astrolabes, sextants replaced.*

*Need UTC now!*

Finally **Kapena Pflum of Hilo, Hawaii**, asks a question I am often asked: "Ever write 'game over' in your notebook and then turn out to be wrong?" Actually, no. But if I did, I wouldn't tell you!

**Monday, November 13, 2006**

**Updated: November 14, 4:31 PM ET**

NFL's an equal opportunity league

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By Gregg Easterbrook

Last week New York State made a worm-can-opening decision to let adults change the gender designations on their birth certificates. The New York Times ran an article speculating on what might happen once people are free to choose their legal genders, and posed several hypotheticals, including, "Would a woman who legally becomes a man be able to play in the National Football League?" The paper mused that such questions "have yet to be explored." Actually TMQ can answer that one right now -- women already are allowed to play in the NFL!

I checked with league spokesman Greg Aiello, who said, "The NFL has no male-only rule. All human beings are eligible, as long as they are three years out of high school and have a usable football skill set." Prep and college football have experienced huge controversies about whether girls and women can play. There's never going to be huge controversy in the NFL, because the decision is already made -- women are welcome.

Of course, today it seems extremely improbable there will ever be a woman, even a kicker, who could win an NFL roster spot on her merits, considering what importance biceps, quads and pecs hold in football. But a generation ago you would have said it was extremely improbable there would ever be female professional basketball players, let alone ones who dunk. Most likely as women in sports become stronger, taller and fitter, men will grow stronger, taller and fitter to the same degree, always leaving the XYs in the dominant position over the XXs. But one never knows. TMQ has said this before: It's only a matter of time until a woman plays in the NFL, and I hope never to meet that woman.

In other football news, San Diego at Cincinnati turned out to be one of the best and most exciting NFL games ever: see analysis below. Looking at the day's schedule and knowing there were two broadcasts scheduled for the Washington, D.C., area for Sunday's 1 p.m. ET slot -- Fox showing Redskins at Philadelphia and CBS having the rights to Chargers at Bengals -- I eagerly expected to see this marquee contest. Imagine my dismay when instead Baltimore at Tennessee was beamed to our nation's capital. What's going on here? The NFL's maddening "secondary markets" rule required that the Ravens' game air in Washington. In league-network contracts, some cities are designated "secondary markets" for nearby franchises. Because Washington is designated a secondary market for Baltimore, and Baltimore a secondary market for Washington, our nation's capital sees all the Ravens' road games, while Charm City sees all the Redskins' road games.

The secondary market rule can be nutty -- for instance, Erie, Pa., usually sees Bills' games rather than Steelers' games, and Erie is, after all, in Pennsylvania, not New York. Oakland and San Francisco see each other's road games, which in recent seasons should be forbidden for humanitarian reasons. And the rule applies only to road games, not sold-out home dates, for no logical reason TMQ can figure out. But what's really maddening about the secondary-markets rule is that it often forbids local affiliates from showing the day's best matchup.

As this column notes ad infinitum (Latin for "by using my AutoText"), the NFL spares no expense to stage fabulous games, then often makes it impossible for viewers to watch the games. It's understandable that local affiliates always would show the home team, even if this means passing on a headliner matchup to air a losing local team's contest. But the idea that local affiliates also must

show a nearby out-of-town team, even if a great game is available on the same network, is ridiculous -- to say nothing of bad economics, since it would seem that broadcasters would maximize ratings by airing the best possible pairings. Dan Masonson of NFL headquarters told TMQ, "A secondary market is a TV market in the team's home territory with stations having signal penetration back to within 75 miles of that team's stadium." Since Fed Ex Field and M&T Bank Stadium are within 75 miles of each other, the cities must see each other's road games. OK, that's the rule. But *why* is it the rule? Why does the NFL impose a broadcast directive that often has the effect of forbidding large blocks of viewers from watching marquee contests?

[This independent Web site](#), noted by many readers including Valerie Rutledge of Aspen, Colo., maps out what parts of the country get which game. On Sunday only the Ohio Valley, Pacific Northwest, southern California, Nevada, Alaska and parts of Texas, North Carolina and Illinois [saw Bolts at Bengals](#). Hawaii and most of Texas saw Jersey/B at New England, the farm belt saw Kansas City at Miami, New Orleans and Michigan's Upper Peninsula inexplicably saw Bills at Colts. Please, National Football League -- junk the secondary markets rule, which is a vestige of the days when television jammed things down viewers' throats and viewers were supposed to accept it without protest. The secondary markets rule is especially offensive because the NFL continues to grant a monopoly over its Sunday Ticket package -- a fabulous product that allows viewers to pay to see any game -- to DirecTV, the satellite provider. DirecTV is great, but since millions of American households cannot receive DirecTV, this monopoly effectively bars viewer choice, even to viewers who happily would pay extra.

Today the Senate Judiciary Committee holds a hearing on whether the DirecTV monopoly on Sunday Ticket is [anti-consumer and constitutes restraint of trade](#). Finally, Congress has noticed this issue! TMQ's prediction: The NFL, which seriously does not want Congress rethinking the antitrust exemption granted to the league in 1961 over its television contracts, better move pronto to make Sunday Ticket available to all cable carriers. The 1961 agreement with Congress specifies that in exchange for an antitrust exemption, the NFL will make its broadcasts available to everyone. Instead, the Sunday Ticket broadcast operates under a monopoly structure. Congress is already in a foul mood about the NCAA's tax-exempt status for profitable D-I football. The new Congress will want to differentiate itself from the last by being pro-consumer. The NFL's television contracts are worth nearly \$4 billion a year; the league would be foolish to run any risk with that sum. Roger Goodell, change your deal with DirecTV before Congress changes it for you.

In other NFL television news, we sure hope you like the 2-7 Tampa Bay Buccaneers, who were on "Monday Night Football" last night and will be telecast nationally at Dallas on Thanksgiving Day. Maybe you'll want to plan a family touch-football game for early afternoon on T-Day, since the early nationally televised contest is Miami at Detroit, teams with a current combined record of 5-13. But the interesting thing about Thanksgiving will be the first NFL Network live game broadcast that night.

There's a quiet conspiracy theory holding that the NFL Network, which wants cable carriers to place its product on basic cable, not on a premium-pay digital tier, manipulated the Thanksgiving schedule. Being on basic cable is far more attractive financially than being on premium, because basic goes to most of the country's households and thus is very appealing to advertisers. Time Warner and Comcast are resisting putting the NFL Network on basic cable -- they think the monthly fee the NFL Network is asking is too high. Time Warner has even established [a Web site that aggressively denounces NFL Network's money demands](#). But can any cable carrier resist offering all customers the best access to the most important sport? Now consider the conspiracy angle. Check the Thanksgiving lineup -- a crummy game on CBS (Miami at Detroit), a crummy game on

Fox (Tampa at Dallas), and a fantastic game on NFL Network (Denver at Kansas City). Technically the NFL Network bid for television rights to NFL games as an independent firm receiving no special treatment, and technically Harvard doesn't favor the children of big donors, either. The conspiracy theory holds that the league manipulated the Thanksgiving schedule so that when millions of Americans look in their newspaper listings next week and realize Thanksgiving's hot game is on a channel their cable carriers do not provide, they will call Comcast, Time Warner and others to demand that the NFL Network be added to basic cable. Don't be surprised if this happens across the country on the day before Thanksgiving.

And in other football news, years ago TMQ called the franchise that plays in the desert the Arizona (Caution: May Contain Football-Like Substance) Cardinals. Consumers should be warned! With Arizona at this point almost comically bad -- see details below -- TMQ once again rolls out that cognomen. Plus a new, well-known gentleman dons the mantle of TMQ's Single Worst Play of the Season So Far. And it's not Terrell Owens!

**Stat of the Week No. 1:** Carson Palmer threw for 440 yards, three touchdowns, no interceptions -- and Cincinnati lost.

**Stat of the Week No. 2:** Drew Brees threw for 398 yards, a touchdown, no interceptions -- and New Orleans lost.

**Stat of the Week No. 3:** Denver, at 7-2, has scored just 12 points more than Tennessee, at 2-7.

**Stat of the Week No. 4:** Houston has 21 wins in its franchise history; six are against Jacksonville.

**Stat of the Week No. 5:** Cincinnati is 1-5 since center Rich Braham went out injured.

**Stat of the Week No. 6:** Three different players named Johnson scored for Cincinnati in the same quarter, as noted by reader Renfei Tu of Ocala, Fla.

**Stat of the Week No. 7:** Buffalo's Terrence McGee had 233 return yards, more than the 162 yards recorded by the team's entire offense.

**Stat of the Week No. 8:** Seattle is 6-3 despite being outscored.

**Stat of the Week No. 9:** In the Tampa-Carolina "Monday Night Football" game, there were three interceptions in 77 seconds.

**Stat of the Week No. 10:** Discounting meaningless contests played after the Colts locked their best postseason seeding, Indianapolis has won 30 consecutive regular-season games.

**Cheerleader of the Week:** For nearly a decade the Eagles Cheerleaders have owned the cutting edge of cheesecake technology. It was the Eagles Cheerleaders who went beyond the swimsuit calendar [to the lingerie calendar](#); who pioneered the sideline bikini look, with Vera Wang designed outfits that are little more than [Riviera swimsuits plus athletic support for hip-hopping](#); who placed the first [age-appropriateness warning](#) on an NFL Web site; whose lingerie pictures caused Tuesday Morning Quarterback to declare that some images could not be shown "for thong-based reasons." Nobody's got it goin' on and puts it out there like the Eagles Cheerleaders.

Then a few weeks ago something went horribly, horribly wrong. For the Jax at Eagles game, Philadelphia's cheerleaders wore track suits. The Eagles proceeded to lose, their high-scoring offense held to six points. OK, so kickoff temperature was [53 degrees with a 24-mph wind gusting to 57 mph](#). But still! How are the Eagles supposed to win if their cheerleaders are fully clothed? Reader Beth Youells of West Melbourne, Fla., wrote to TMQ at the time, "Though I'm a pretty free-thinking kind of girl, you can imagine my husband's amusement when we saw the Eagles'

cheerleaders take the field against the Jaguars. The first thought that came to my mind was: 'Uh-oh. They're wearing pants. This isn't good.'" Beth offers a haiku:

*Even chick fans know:*

*When cheerleaders are covered,  
the home team is doomed.*

This week as Washington visited Philadelphia, the Eagles' cheer-babes were back on their feet. Kickoff temperature: 61 degrees with rain and gusting wind, yet they came out in two-piece numbers barely more than bikinis -- outstanding professionalism! Needless to say, Philadelphia won handily. In recognition, this week's Cheerleader of the Week is [Janette of the Eagles](#). According to her team bio, Janette is a gymnastics instructor with a nursing degree. A nurse *and* a cheerleader -- male fantasy overload! On her team bio, Janette answered the question, "How does a guy get your attention?" thusly: "It's intriguing to me when he has total confidence and a sense of humor." So Janette, I am completely, utterly, absolutely certain you will find TMQ hilarious.

**Sweet Play of the Week No. 1:** Twice this season, TMQ has done items on NFL defensive linemen who are so overweight and out of shape, they can't run all the way to the end zone after picking up fumbles. No such problem for St. Louis defensive end Victor Adeyanju, who sprinted at full speed the length of the field for an 89-yard touchdown against Seattle.

**Sweet Play of the Week No. 2:** Under tackle, Vince Young flipped a sweet lateral to tight end Bo Scaife, who ran for the touchdown. Young also ran one in himself on the QB sweep. Quarterback rushes are especially effective at the goal line because when the quarterback runs the offense is playing 11-on-11, versus playing 10-on-11 when the quarterback hands off.

**Sweet Series of Plays:** Miami called three trick plays against Kansas City: one worked, one backfired and one simply led to an incomplection. That's about par for the course for trick plays. The one that worked was the "flea flicker" -- Ronnie Brown took a hand off up the middle, then turned and pitched the ball back to Joey Harrington, who threw for 46 yards to Chris Chambers, and the Dolphins got their only touchdown on the next snap. At that point, Harrington had heaved six consecutive incomplections toward Chambers, so the Dolphins really needed a spark. (Over the years I have wondered why this action is called a "flea flicker," and never heard a convincing explanation.) The one that backfired was an attempted reverse; fumble, recovered by Kansas City and the Chiefs got their only touchdown a few snaps later. The incomplection came as Brown, running to his left, tossed a halfback pass left-handed. The Dolphins also ran an end around, but that doesn't really count as a trick play. Note that Kansas City was flat and Damon Huard unimpressive on the Sunday after the little-known Huard received lots of publicity, prominently a big profile in the New York Times.

**Sour Play of the Week:** Last week TMQ singled out cornerback Al Harris of Green Bay for a sour play on which he covered no one, standing around making the high school mistake of "looking into the backfield" as Lee Evans streaked past him for a long touchdown catch. This week Harris did exactly the same thing, simply standing there looking into the backfield as Billy McMullen of Minnesota streaked past him for a long touchdown catch.



It's been a rough couple of weeks for Al Harris 'round these parts.

**Sour Tactics of the Week No. 1:** Against Cleveland, Atlanta rushed 29 times for an average of 5.1 yards per play, and passed 41 times for an average of 4.6 yards per play. Michael Vick's throwing success of a month ago is a distant memory -- but what's worse is that

Falcons' coaches seem to be operating under the illusion that Vick is suddenly a polished drop-back passer. A month ago when things were working for Atlanta, the Falcons were running a high-school-inspired offense -- rush, rush, rush, then play-fake and sprint out. Losing each of the past two weeks, Atlanta coaches have kept Vick standing in the pocket as if he were Peyton Manning, and it's not working, resulting in both poor passing stats and overlooking the good stats of the Atlanta run game. Trailing 17-13, the Falcons took possession with 5:27 remaining and went incompleting, run for 4 yards, incompleting, punt. Your running game works -- so run the ball! Note: was that an optical illusion, or did both Charlie Frye and Kellen Winslow look fabulous?

Vick's tendency to wave the ball around when scrambling also has gotten out of hand. A careless Vick fumble was a key play in the team's loss at Detroit last week; Sunday, Vick carelessly fumbled in Cleveland territory just before the two-minute warning. A beginner's mistake is to "use the ball for balance," waving the football on one side of your body while you cut the other way. Vick does this far too often, and it's the kind of fundamental error that should not be tolerated from a Pro Bowl quarterback.

**Sour Tactics of the Week No. 2:** Trailing San Francisco 19-13 with 2:41 remaining, the Lions faced fourth-and-13 on the Squared Sevens' 19, holding two timeouts. A fourth-and-13 conversion is unlikely; a short field goal closes the margin to three points and means Detroit, between timeouts and the two-minute warning, can get the ball back with plenty of time if staging a successful stop. Instead interception, game over.

**Best Play Ere the Clock Struck Midnight:** Carolina tried various sideline fly routes all night against City of Tampa and they didn't particularly work, but then nothing else was working either. Leading 17-10 with 3:18 remaining, the Cats sent Steve Smith on an out-and-up along the left sideline and it finally worked, game-icing touchdown as Smith beat either Ronde Barber or Tiki Barber. That final Carolina drive must have made the football gods wince. Taking possession with a touchdown lead and 8:26 left, a classic clock-killer situation, the Panthers called as many passes as rushes. Can't anybody just run up the middle to seal a game anymore?

**Proofreaders Shocked by "Consumer Reports" Article Praising American Cars:** The Ford Fusion, Mercury Milan, Lincoln Zephyr and Chevy Tahoe all were near the top of the latest Consumer Reports [auto quality survey](#). American-marque cars have not topped that survey since Lyndon Johnson was president. There's a theory in the car world that Detroit auto executives and United Auto Workers members do their best work when their companies are losing money, and thus are desperate to please customers. If so, this seems a fine time to buy an American-marque car.

Recently I drove a rented Mercury Milan and loved it. The car felt good, handled well and seemed tightly finished. If the rental clerk had handed me the key but "Honda" had been written across all the car's badges, I would have said, "Hey, so this is the new Honda."

**Social Justice Goes Six-for-Six:** In the hoopla over last week's historic elections, it is important this detail not be missed: Six states held referenda on raising their minimum wage, and in all six the measures passed by big margins. Success margins ranged up to 76 percent yes in Missouri.

The six-for-six success of higher minimum wage proposals tells us four things. First, Americans are a fundamentally generous people. The majority of voters who said yes to raising the minimum wage are above that wage themselves, and know higher minimums will result in higher prices for their goods and services. Second, concern with social justice is a rising trend among Christian voters. The 76 percent yes in Missouri is especially revealing because evangelical turnout was high in that state, owing to a referendum about embryonic stem cell research on the same ballot. Jesus taught that the first concern of social policy should be the needy, and in recent years, evangelical Christianity has been waking up to that teaching. (On that topic I recommend to readers the new book "Tempting Faith" by former George W. Bush aide David Kuo, an evangelical; also it's important that Rick Warren, America's most prominent Christian pastor, has recently been talking more about obligations to the needy than any other topic.) Third, the referenda results are another indicator of how far out of touch the House and Senate were, since in 2006 the Republican leadership in both chambers worked to sabotage a higher federal minimum wage. Finally and most importantly, the vote tells us the federal minimum wage *must* go up.

Today the federal minimum is just \$5.15 an hour. Some states have higher minimums -- that's what the votes were about -- but others do not, and in all states local actual wages tend to shadow the federal minimum, rising when the federal number rises. It is shocking, and an indictment of Washington, that today's federal minimum wage is barely worth half the minimum of the 1960s. Expressed in today's dollars, the minimum wage would need to be \$10.20 an hour to have the same value as the federal minimum of 1968. Through the 1960s, full-time work at the federal minimum wage kept a family of three above the poverty trend; today a family of three headed by a full-time minimum wage worker is [24 percent below the poverty line](#). Yes, teenagers from affluent families working summer jobs don't need \$10 an hour -- a teen-wage exception to the minimum seems fine. But our social contract should ensure that any adult who works full time receives basic financial security, and a \$10-an-hour federal minimum wage would achieve that end. A \$10 federal minimum wage would increase the cost of pizza delivery. It would also increase social justice: and all Americans ought to vote for that.

**San Diego-Cincinnati Analysis:** Trailing 28-7 at intermission, here are the results of San Diego possessions in the second half: touchdown, touchdown, touchdown, touchdown, touchdown, punt, touchdown, victory formation. What was striking about the Bolts' comeback is that it was not triggered by turnovers, as comebacks usually are: Cincinnati coughed up the ball only once in the second half. What was striking as well is that the Bengals never let up: when Cincinnati scored to take a 38-28 lead at the end of the third quarter, I thought the Chargers' comeback might expire. Next, what was striking is that even after collapsing from a 28-7 advantage to a 49-41 deficit, Cincinnati did not fold, reaching first down at the San Diego 15 before four consecutive incompletions ended the game. And of course it was striking that a Marvin Lewis-coached club could not hold a 21-point lead at home.

But here's what was really great about the San Diego comeback -- the Chargers did it with a balanced attack, not by going pass-wacky. In the first half, San Diego coaches called 16 passes and 10 rushes; in the second half, 23 passes and 14 rushes. TMQ preaches: Unless it's late, when you're

behind do not start throwing on every down, because this hands the game to the defense. Call from the regular playbook, mix the pass and run, get a touchdown and then see what the world looks like. Fourteen times during an historic 42-point second half, San Diego coaches simply handed the ball to LaDainian Tomlinson -- and it worked because Cincinnati was in a soft nickel or dime look for the entire second half. Running backs love to rush against a soft nickel. There was exciting play after exciting play in this contest: Tomlinson running for 14 yards on a key third-and-2; Philip Rivers twice at the goal line faking to star tight end Antonio Gates then throwing touchdown passes to his backup Brandon Manumaleuna; a 74-yard touchdown pass to Chad Johnson; three single-play touchdown drives. But what meant most in the end is that San Diego didn't panic, rather it kept mixing plays. And now you know what I am going to say about TMQ's Law of the Obvious: Sometimes all a team needs to do is run up the middle for no gain, and things will be fine. From the point it was the home team leading 28-7 in the third quarter, to the Bengals' final possession when they were forced to throw on every down, Cincinnati coaches called 12 passes and 11 runs. Five of the passes fell incomplete, stopping the clock. When you're playing with a big second-half lead, don't call more passes than runs.

Terminology note: Last week TMQ said the short-yardage action on which the quarterback fakes up the middle then backhand-flips to the tailback sprinting outside was dubbed Flip 90 by its designer, Mike Martz. Scouts Inc.'s K.C. Joyner points out that in Martz's system, "90" meant outside left; many teams use odd numbers for offensive left gaps, even numbers for right gaps. On his key third-and-2 run, Tomlinson took this odd-looking action to the right against a seven-man Cincinnati blitz. Hence, he ran Flip 80.

**NFL Prejudiced Against Space Aliens:** So "human beings" are allowed in the NFL, but not Klingons? Obviously pro football is prejudiced against Klingons, Vorlons, Cylons and Taelons! And why do the names of sci-fi aliens always end in "-on?" The Vorlons were one of the sinister aliens of the old show "Babylon 5." Sci-fi fans continue to lament that its planned follow-on series folded after a few episodes. What I liked about the "Babylon 5" follow-on series was that the key spaceship was modeled on the *Starduster*, starship in the old "Space Angel" cartoon series of the early 1960s. If you go [here](#) and click on "Space Angel," you can see a grainy image of the glamorous *Starduster*, plus series heroes Scott McCloud, Taurus and Crystal Mace. Airing from 1962 to 1964, "Space Angel" plowed the ground that "Star Trek" would walk beginning in 1966, especially boundless optimism that a handful of wisecracking people aboard a snazzy starship would be able to accomplish more good than harm in the cosmos. For many Boomers, "Space Angel," not "Star Trek," was their first exposure to the notion of gallivanting around the galaxy -- and "Star Trek" bore more debt to "Space Angel" than its creators liked to admit. There have been so many fads involving back-in-the-day shows from the morning age of television. Why hasn't there been a "Space Angel" nostalgia fad?

**For This Reason Alone, Kwan Will Be the First American Diplomat in a Generation Who Is Popular in France:** Skater Michelle Kwan has been named a "public diplomatic envoy" -- goodwill ambassador -- by Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice. Surely this makes Kwan the first American diplomat ever to have done swimsuit modeling!

**Adventures in Officiating:** Facing second-and-goal on the Pittsburgh 4, the Saints appeared to execute a bouncing direct-snap to tailback Deuce McAllister, who ran for the touchdown. Announcers debated whether it was a trick play or a botched snap. It was the latter, and the official Game Book lists the play as a fumble by center Jeff Faine. Overlooked -- there should have been a penalty! Direct-snapping to a running back is legal only if the quarterback never places his hands under center; once someone places his hands under center, only that person can receive the snap.

Drew Brees was under center when this happened. Rule 7-3-4 states, "Any extension of hands by a player under center as if to receive the snap is a false start unless, while under center, he receives the snap."

**Best Blocks:** As Willie Parker sprinted 72 yards, Pittsburgh's Marvel Smith, Alan Faneca, Dan Kreider and Cedrick Wilson got perfect blocks. The play was a simple off-tackle -- but because it was second-and-18, New Orleans was in a nickel with only six men inside the "box," where they were overwhelmed by seven blockers. Faneca initially double-teamed a Saints' defensive lineman, then sprinted upfield to paste someone else too, executing the "secondary block" that so many pro linemen can't be bothered with. Parker ended the possession with a 3-yard touchdown run that put the Steelers ahead for good. On that snap, New Orleans lined up with all three linebackers inside the offensive tackles, and Pittsburgh simply sent Parker outside. It appeared the Hypocycloids' game plan was keyed on Ben Roethlisberger checking whether the Saints' linebackers lined up -- and this worked to the tune of 217 yards rushing for the victors.

**We're All Professionals Here:** Trailing undefeated Indianapolis 17-16 with 7:38 remaining, Buffalo had second-and-3 on the Colts' 15 and a great chance for the colossal upset. The Bills went loss of yardage, loss of yardage, missed field goal, and TMQ wrote the words "game over" in his notebook. Note: In the past two weeks, J.P. Losman has completed 17 passes and been sacked nine times.

### **Religious Leaders Also Endorse Tap Beer Over**

**Bottled Beer:** The United Church of Canada, the country's largest Protestant denomination, has asked members to [stop buying bottled water](#), saying that because "water is a sacred gift that connects all life," therefore "the privatization of water must be avoided." It isn't clear why water privately held in small bottles is offensive whereas water privately held in, say, the baptismal pools of United Church of Canada sanctuaries is fine. Bottled water has no known health benefits versus tap water in the United States, where municipal water purity standards are high. Sometimes bottled water is a convenience, other times simply a status marker; churches are supposed to oppose the use, for



You take this for granted. The world's poor do not.

status, of money that might go to the poor, so at least in that sense of United Church of Canada campaign can be defended theologically. If the members of the United Church of Canada saved whatever they would spend on bottled water and donated that sum to the impoverished of the developing world, that would be admirable. If the same people refuse to buy bottled water, then spend the savings on faux-granite countertops for their kitchens, this accomplishes nothing. Especially considering that Canada is the Saudi Arabia of water -- no nation has a greater surplus of freshwater resources, compared to population needs. The rivers of Quebec roar with so much pristine freshwater from the Laurentide ice sheet, which has been melting for 18,000 years and still is far from thawed, that Canadians have more water than they or their descendants will ever need.

The situation is very different in the developing world. The United Nations Development Programme just published its latest [Human Development Report](#), one of the world's most important annual documents. (Tomorrow your columnist is moderator for the Washington unveiling of the report -- note the [announcement](#) is the first United Nations press release ever to mention ESPN.com.) This year's report focuses on safe water in the developing world. Roughly 1.1 billion

people lack clean drinking water. The waterborne illnesses they suffer as a result not only cause human misery -- each year in the developing world there are more deaths from diarrhea diseases than from cancer in the United States and nations of the European Union combined -- but also hold back developing nations, as the sick can't look after themselves. Some 2.6 billion worldwide lack proper sanitary conditions for wastewater treatment.

In the Middle East and in much of China, where aquifers are being depleted at an alarming rate to support rice cultivation, freshwater scarcity is the core problem. But the new *Human Development Report* argues that poverty, government corruption and lack of infrastructure, not water availability, are the biggest malefactors overall. The situation is especially painful in the poor parts of many developing world cities, where there is no reliable municipal water service, and the poor spend as much as a third of their meager incomes to buy safe water. Even an American or Canadian who's chugging all the Dasani he or she can hold spends far less than 1 percent of his or her income on safe water.

As the United States looks outward to the world for good deeds our nation can do, helping impoverished nations improve their drinking water supplies and water sanitation stands near the top of the list. The United Nations report estimates \$10 billion in capital investment could provide 500 million poor people with safe drinking water. That's roughly one month of United States military expenditures in Iraq. Suppose we accelerated our inevitable withdrawal from Iraq by a single month -- and remember, withdrawal always has been inevitable. Suppose the \$10 billion in savings was invested in developing-world water purity. Such United States action literally could be a lifesaver for millions and improve America's image in the world, rather than diminish it.

**At Happy Hour in Hell's Sports Bar, the Margaritas Are Boiling, Not Frozen:** Hell's sports bar has 28 wide-screen plasma TVs, and on Sunday all were showing Houston 13, Jacksonville 10. For the highlight program, all 28 screens in Hell's Sports Bar showed nothing but, over and over, highly paid first-round draft choice Matt Jones of Jax letting two perfectly thrown passes bounce off his hands for interceptions.

**Hoist on His Own Petard:** Since Gillette Field opened, there have been rumors Bill Belichick deliberately keeps the playing surface in bad condition so his players but not visitors will know where the sweet spots are. The new stadium itself is gleaming and magnificently well thought-out, yet the playing surface is dumpy. Coincidence? Belichick's grounds keeping plot came back to haunt him as Eric "I Was a Teenaged Coach" Mangini brought the Jets to visit during a rainstorm. Twice with Jersey/B leading 10-6, Tom Brady auto-sacked himself when he slipped in mud; overall, New England players seemed to fall more often than Jets.

I don't know about you, but at this point I am sick of all the Belichick-Parcells-Mangini-Curtis Martin byplay between the Patriots and the Jets. They compete with each other. Why do they constantly have to be angry at each other? Perplexing Belichick moment: Leading 17-14 with 1:15 remaining, the Jets faced fourth-and-10 on the New England 40 and deliberately let the clock run out. Belichick declined the penalty, which would have marched Jersey/B backward five yards; Troy Brown ended up fair-catching on the New England 11, effectively ending the game. Most punters would rather kick from the 45 than the 40 in perfect conditions, but given the driving rain and 1:15 remaining, New England needed to push the Jets back. I couldn't help wondering if Belichick declined the penalty solely because he knew Mangini did it deliberately, the master wanting to frustrate his former student.

**Norwegians Complained About Their Government Complaining About the Complaining:** The new *Human Development Report* ranks Norway as the world's best place to live and Niger as the

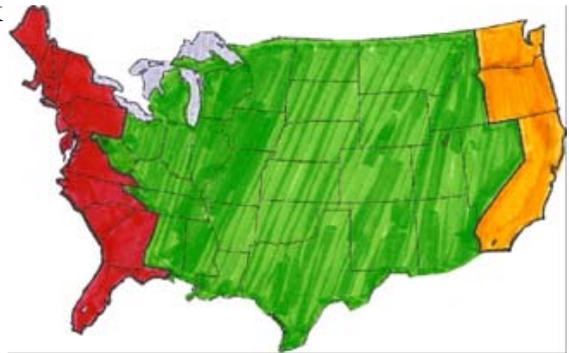
world's worst; the United States ranked eighth. The report praised Norway for modernism, personal and sexual freedom, affluence, little crime, a clean environment and generous benefits funded by the country's oil wealth. It was Norway's sixth consecutive first-place finish in the report, and the news prompted Norwegian government minister Erik Solheim to protest a "culture of whining" in which Norwegians spend too much time complaining. But Erik, that's a complaint too! Finishing fourth on the United Nations ranking of best places to live was Ireland, and talk about a comeback story. Just a generation ago, the young left Ireland and you couldn't give away an Irish country house. Now Ireland's economy, culture and real-estate market are running at Gold Rush levels.

**Single Worst Play of the Season So Far:** Tennessee leading 26-20, Baltimore had second-and-6 on the Flaming Thumbtacks' 11 late in the fourth quarter. Very highly paid cornerback Adam "Pacman" Jones lined up across from Derrick Mason, the Ravens' best receiver. Jones was in man coverage. Mason ran a down-and-in. Jones simply stood there watching him, making no attempt to interfere, as Mason caught the winning touchdown. Check the replay: Jones jogs a few steps, then just comes to a halt and watches. This is the Single Worst Play of the Season So Far.

**Best Crowd Reaction:** When the Eagles launched a mincing fraidy-cat punt on fourth-and-3 from the Washington 40 -- never punt in the Maroon Zone! -- the Lincoln Field crowd booed lustily.

**Pelosi Also Promised to "Avoid Clichés Like the Plague":** The night she learned she would become Speaker of the House, Nancy Pelosi promised to "take this country in a new direction." If the United States had a "new direction," wouldn't California face Europe and the Carolinas face Asia? Politicians often pledge to "turn the country around," which sounds like an exceptionally bad idea, or to "get this country moving," which would only cause earthquakes.

Madam Speaker note: Pelosi announced she would back Rep. John Murtha for House Majority Leader because, by declaring opposition to the Iraq War, Murtha "spoke truth to power." Murtha is not a penniless wandering sage, he is himself among the most powerful people in the United States! Back when Republicans were impeaching Bill Clinton, Rep. Henry Hyde declared what they were doing was "speaking truth to power." Hyde, at the time chairman of the House Judiciary Committee, was himself among the most powerful people in the United States. The phrase "speaking truth



to power" is apt when a disenfranchised person follows his or her conscience at some personal risk. When rich people living in sinecure and privilege, such as members of the House of Representatives, pat themselves on the back for supposedly "speaking truth to power" -- especially when all they've done is criticize the opposition party! -- it is more proof of how spoiled and out-of-touch Washington lawmakers are.

**Samkon Gado Play of the Week:** Leading 13-10 on the road at Jacksonville, Houston faced fourth-and-1 on its 41 with 1:40 remaining, Jax out of timeouts. Rather than punt, the Texans ran Gado up the middle, first down, and the rest was kneeling. Jacksonville has a longstanding habit of honking important games at home, including a 2004 late-December home loss to Houston that knocked the Jags out of the playoffs. As this column has noted, the Jags do an awful lot of talking; it's time they did some playing.

**Tasty, Nutritious Dishes Designed to Be Left Under a Park Bench at 2 a.m.:** The death last week of former East German spymaster Markus Wolf brings the news that in retirement Wolf was

the author of a cookbook, a recipe collection called "The Secrets of Russian Cooking." Hmmm. And if you take the third letter of each ingredient, multiply by the number of pages in the book, divide by the number of words in the recipe ...

**The Raiders Had Randy Moss, Jerry Porter and Doug Gabriel -- and There's a Reason the One New England Traded for Was the One You'd Never Heard Of:** A couple weeks ago, TMQ noted that New England Patriots' receivers helmets are stamped INSERT HEAD, BECOME STAR. Reche Caldwell, Doug Gabriel -- nobody else in the league even wanted them, at New England this season both are playing swell. The flip side of this issue is that when receivers remove the Flying Elvii helmet, they turn back into pumpkins. In the winter of 2005, David Patten, who played like a star in New England, signed a big-money, free-agent contract with Washington; in the season and a half since, Patten has 23 receptions and no touchdowns, and often does not get into games even when healthy. This winter David Givens, who played like a star in New England, signed a big-money contract with Tennessee; he missed a month with injuries, and otherwise has eight receptions and no touchdowns. Let's see, coming to New England makes a mediocre receiver look good, leaving New England makes a good receiver look mediocre. What do these propositions have in common? A part-time male model named Tom Brady.

**Sweet 'N' Sour Play:** Every few years Tuesday Morning Quarterback is stunned that some NFL team -- despite dozens of coaching-staff and scouting-department people who do nothing but football all year long and are collectively paid millions of dollars -- seems unaware that a missed field goal can be returned. Usually field goal attempts go out of the end zone, so this doesn't come up much. But on the long try, the defense should have a return man ready, and the kicking team should be prepared to play defense. Chicago leading 24-20 early in the fourth quarter, Jersey/A lined up to attempt a 52-yard field goal. The weak-legged Jay Feely (6-of-16 lifetime from beyond the 50) was the kicker. The Bears put speed merchant Devin Hester in the end zone. Feely's kick clanged short. Hester fielded it and cleverly began to stroll slowly, as if about the hand the ball to an official; then took off for a 108-yard touchdown that broke open the game. Not only were the Bears ready for a short kick, they had a return called -- it was "return right," with coordinated blocking. That was sweet. The Giants seemed not to know the field goal try could be run back, *even though Chicago did exactly the same thing in the same situation for a 108-yard touchdown return last season.* That was seriously sour. Note: Last year the Bears had six touchdown returns, and this year already have three. There's nothing more demoralizing than to work, work, work for every yard of field position, then suddenly see some skinny gentleman racing up the sideline in the other direction.

**I'm Still Waiting for Quiznos to Call About "Tuesday Morning Quarterback Sponsored by Quiznos:"** Newspaper circulation continues to decline, though as Michael Knisley has noted, when the Web is taken into account, more people are now reading newspapers than ever before. Keeping newspapers in business requires advertising, so what should newspapers hope for? Bad news for corporations! Often when there are business scandals, corporations go on a spending spree for ads. This week most major newspapers have full-page advertisements purchased by the manufacturer of Tylenol, alerting consumers that its brand of acetaminophen is not involved in the recent recall. Remember last winter, when the oil companies were being hammered by complaints about high prices and profits? According to the ad-monitoring service TNS Media Intelligence, in January and February 2006, oil companies spent \$53 million on image advertising, double their amount from the same months in 2005. (Hey Exxon Mobil, if you sponsor TMQ, I promise to stop mentioning global warming.) My favorite recent example involved electricity rates soaring in Maryland because of deregulation. Consumers have been complaining, then recently Pepco, the state's big utility, bought

full-page newspaper ads asserting it was doing everything possible to hold down prices. The cost of the ads was billed to ratepayers.

**Preposterous Punts Watch No. 1:** The Arizona (Caution: May Contain Football-Like Substance) Cardinals reached fourth-and-2 on the Dallas 49 and punted. Just to prove it was no fluke, later Arizona reached fourth-and-2 on the Dallas 47 and punted. Not only is it crazy to punt on fourth-and-short in opposition territory -- you're 1-7, what have you got to lose? And now you are 1-8. Note: I don't wish to alarm anyone, but Tony Romo has the NFL's second-best passer rating, trailing only Peyton Manning.

**Preposterous Punt Watch No. 2:** Pittsburgh leading 31-24 with 11:00 remaining, the United States Saints faced fourth-and-6 on the Steelers' 39; when the punt boomed, TMQ wrote the words "game over" in his notebook. (Two downs later, Willie Parker ran 76 yards and the game was, in fact, over.) Not only was this yet another example of punting in opposition territory when trailing late. On the previous down, New Orleans faced third-and-6. Given the scoreboard, clock and field position, Saints' coaches should have assumed a two-down situation -- calling a run on the assumption the team would go on fourth. Instead, New Orleans threw for the first and, failing, punted. If you know you're going on fourth, your third-down call should be calculated to ensure you get at least some of the required yardage.

**And Rumor Says Larry Brown Is Complaining That \$43 Million for Two Years Isn't Enough:** The bottom line on Larry Brown is that between his contract buyout to leave the Detroit Pistons and his contract settlement to leave the New York Knicks, he received a staggering \$43 million for two years of coaching. And bear in mind -- it was two years of doing a terrible job. At Detroit, Brown walked out on a playoff team, and before walking out was undercutting the team's championship chances by discussing his desire to leave. The next season at New York he won only 23 games, while frequently denouncing in public the Knicks' players and management.

So it seems Larry Brown is evidence of two TMQ laws. First, my Iron Law of Modern Cultural Economics: This holds that the worse something is, the more money it makes. This law does not apply to the markets for industrial and consumer products. There, competitive forces function as econ textbooks say they should: High-quality products win, poor-quality products are rejected, and the market relentlessly pressures for the best price. In culture, textbook economics break down. Books, movies, music, celebrity-hood -- the worse something is, the more money it makes, while high-quality products fare poorly or fail outright. Also Brown proves TMQ's law of job-hopping coaches: When you hire someone who's only in it for himself, you get someone who's only in it for himself.

**Huh? What?** Trailing Cleveland 14-3, Atlanta attempt an onside kick -- with eight seconds left in the first half. What was that supposed to accomplish? Weirdly, the Browns then lined up to attempt a Hail Mary from the Falcons' 49, and fumbled; Atlanta recovered and lateraled twice, reaching the Cleveland 17 as time expired.

**Stop Me Before I Blitz Again! No. 1:** Philadelphia lead 3-0 and had first down on its 16. The Redskins big-blitzed. Donte Stallworth ran an out-and-up; highly paid corner Shawn Springs simply watched him go by, covering no one; highly paid safety Sean Taylor was way out of position if the coverage was two-deep; as Stallworth completed his 84-yard touchdown, the sole Redskin bothering to chase him was linebacker Lemar Marshall. This is the first time I've ever seen a Gregg Williams defense play without pride. And yes, the Philadelphia blitz worked against Washington -- twice in the first half, Eagles' blitzers came across untouched by anyone, though the Nanticokes have one of the league's highest-paid offensive lines. At this point the Washington season is lost, so

it's good that Mark Brunell will sit while we find out what Jason Campbell can do. The aging Brunell seems to be regressing toward inexperience, lately tossing up crazy heave-hoes under pressure. Early at Philadelphia he was about to be hit and heave-hoed for intentional grounding -- just take the sack! In the second half, about to be hit, Brunell heave-hoed directly to Sheldon Brown, who ran it back for the touchdown, icing the game. Letting Campbell play makes the remainder of the Redskins' season interesting.

**Stop Me Before I Blitz Again! No. 2:** Jersey/A had the Ming Ding Xiong ("Bears whose outcomes are decided by fate" in Chinese) on the ropes, leading 13-3 with 42 seconds remaining in the first half, Chicago on the Giants' 29. How about a big blitz? Easy touchdown pass to Mark Bradley, who had five receptions coming into the game.

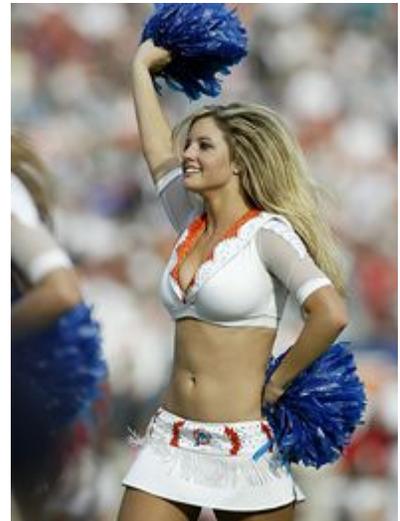
**Immutable Law Observed:** TMQ's immutable law holds, Kick Early Go For It Late. Trailing Oakland 13-7, Denver faced fourth-and-goal on the Raiders' 1 with 11:10 remaining. If it had been the first half, a kick would have been called for. But it was late, and Broncos' coaches wisely went for it -- play-fake touchdown to blocking back Kyle Johnson in the flat. (Calling a play to Johnson, who had three receptions entering the game, is an example of the tactic of, on a pressure down, deliberately throwing it to a guy you never throw to.) Denver note: Just as the Broncos seem to be able to make anyone into a good running back, they seem to be able to make anyone into a good tackle. With undrafted free agent tackle Matt Lepsis out injured, undrafted free agent Erik Pears is playing left tackle for Denver, and playing quite well. This guy is so obscure he's not even listed in the [NFL Players Association player database](#).

**Obscure College Score of the Week:** Indiana of Pennsylvania 21, California of Pennsylvania 17 in the Tuesday Morning Quarterback Obscure College Game of the Year. Anthony Cellitti caught a 28-yard touchdown pass with 50 seconds remaining as the nameless Indiana of Pennsylvania team defeated the Vulcans of California of Pennsylvania at Hepner-Bailey Field in California, Pennsylvania. Located in Indiana, Pa., Indiana of Pennsylvania University has a [formal school policy on civility](#). What it doesn't have is a sports nickname. As noted by IUP alum Brandon Minich, the school once was the Indiana Indians; then adopted a vague ursine-like logo. This season, IUP is playing nameless while the student body debates a new nickname.

**Obscure College Score of the Week No. 2:** Malone 20, Walsh 10. Located in Canton, Ohio, Malone University boasts of being "[among the top colleges and universities in the Midwest](#)" in the latest U.S. News rankings. Malone was 55th of the 70 Midwestern college and universities the magazine ranked. So Malone was "among" the top colleges in the Midwest, but only in the sense that my books are "among" bestsellers at the bookstore. The U.S. News ranking is hardly omniscient; there's no shame in not being at the top. But why must colleges that aren't at the top strain to give the impression they are?

**Reader Animadversion:** Got a complaint or a deeply held grievance? Write me at [TMQ\\_ESPN@yahoo.com](mailto:TMQ_ESPN@yahoo.com). Include your real name and the name of your hometown, and I may quote you by name unless you instruct me otherwise. Note: giving your hometown improves your odds of being quoted.

**Reader Challenge:** In the latest round of contract negotiations, the four established broadcasting organizations that carry NFL games -- CBS, ESPN, Fox and NBC -- agreed to sell some advertising time to NFL Network. Newspapers, magazines and television stations generally are free to accept or reject advertising; the First Amendment forbids censorship by government, but says nothing about what private businesses decide to do with their ad space. As part of the build up to Thanksgiving night, during Sunday's CBS and Fox games, NFL Network ads urged viewers to call their cable carriers and demand the new channel on basic cable. There's some consolation in the awareness that even the mighty NFL needs to rally popular support for its positions. But such ads effectively recommend you watch a network different from the one you're watching -- after all, in order to tune in NFL Network you must first tune out the Columbia Broadcasting System. Challenge to readers: In coming weeks, count instances of television networks airing ads for competitors, and report them using the link at Reader Animadversion. And I mean ads for true competitors, not common-owner channels such as CNN and TBS.



A special treat for those of you that reached the end this week.

**Let Them Jump Up and Down!!!!:** Please, National Football League, reasonable people are begging you, do away with the really stupid new celebration rule! On Sunday night, the Giants were called for celebration because a bunch of guys ran into the end zone and jumped up and down after a touchdown. (The new rule says only the scoring player can celebrate.) Puh-leez! The purpose of professional sports is *entertainment*, and celebrations are entertaining. Or at least do no harm. Sunday night, Giants coach Tim Coughlin repeatedly screamed and cursed at officials while waving his arms like he was possessed. That's the sort of thing that really should draw a flag -- the NBA crackdown on screaming at officials is a great idea. Yet by the rulebook, Coughlin's shows of disrespect were perfectly fine, while a couple guys slapping hands is treated like a violation of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty. This weekend, my son's sixth-grade county flag football team got called for celebration because 11-year-old boys jumped up and down after a score. Puh-leez, offload these silly rules!

**Next Week:** Michelle Kwan wears her bikini at a diplomatic conference, and peace is instantly achieved in the Middle East.

**Monday, November 20, 2006**

**Updated: November 22, 12:45 PM ET**

Stop the INT insanity!

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By Gregg Easterbrook

For years, Tuesday Morning Quarterback has blamed "SportsCenter" for the epidemic of poor tackling in the NFL. Defenders take wild risks, hoping to make a spectacular jacked-up tackle that will be shown on "SportsCenter." But then they whiff and miss the runner completely, whereas if they'd just broken down to proper form and wrapped up, the play would have ended. This weekend there were an unusual number of awful-looking interceptions in the NFL – and I blame that on "SportsCenter," too.

Trailing 17-13, Oakland reached first-and-goal on the Kansas City 8 with 32 seconds remaining, holding two timeouts. The timeouts and the four downs meant if a play wasn't there, Aaron Brooks could simply throw the ball away. Instead on first-and-goal, Brooks heave-hoed a crazy pass into triple coverage – interception, game over. Sometimes the best play a quarterback makes is to throw the ball away. But throwing the ball away doesn't get your clip on "SportsCenter," whereas a dramatic touchdown pass forced into coverage might.

OK, that was Brooks. But Carolina's Jake Delhomme, a Super Bowl starter in 2004, threw a crazy pass into triple coverage – interception. With the Jets near the Chicago goal line, Chad Pennington, who for his career has thrown just one interception per 36 pass attempts (that's excellent, Brett Favre throws a pick every 30 attempts) heave-hoes into triple coverage – interception. After the game Brian Urlacher, who made the pick, said he thought the Jersey/B quarterback never saw him. Maybe not. But subtract Urlacher, and the intended receiver was still double covered! Had Pennington simply tossed the ball away, the Jets would have kicked a field goal for a 3-0 lead. But tossing the ball away would not have gotten Pennington on "SportsCenter." Ben Roethlisberger, Donovan McNabb, Drew Brees, Eli Manning and other quarterbacks threw crazy interceptions forced into coverage this weekend. Coincidence? Tuesday Morning Quarterback thinks not!

In other sports news, don't overlook that on election day, Seattle voters overwhelmingly approved an ordinance forbidding the use of public funds [for NFL, NBA and MLB stadia](#). The proximate result might be that the NBA's SuperSonics leave the Emerald City when their current lease to play at the KeyArena expires. But sports owners beware, this might be the bow wave of an approaching trend. As recently as the 1980s, a civic-minded person could argue that some public expense was justified for pro-sports stadium construction in order to create economic activity, especially in downtown areas. Now there's *so* much money pouring into pro sports, and many owners are *so* rich, that it has become obscene to expect taxpayers to fund facilities that generate private profit for the wealthy. It's troubling, too, that with the majority of today's pro sports facilities being partially or wholly publicly funded, the owners claim proprietary rights regarding images of what happens inside. If, say, Indiana taxpayers are going to pay for the Colts' new stadium – as they are – why shouldn't anyone film or broadcast what happens within this public venue, ending the NFL's exclusive network agreements? TMZ expects this view to gain legal traction in the coming years. Pro sports commissioners: Better start planning now to pay your own stadium costs on a free-market basis.

In other NFL news, at 7:18 p.m. ET on Sunday, as the Colts left Stonehenge Field in Irving, Texas, 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, the sole perfect team in modern pro football history, sets aside a bottle of champagne to cool. And it's genuine champagne from the French province of Champagne, not the boysenberry-infused sparkling-Gewurztraminer wine-like substance that passes for bubbly these days. At the moment the stadium clock hits all-naughts for the vanquishing of the season's last undefeated team, the 1972 Dolphins pull the corks, secure in the knowledge that they will reign as the sole perfect team for at least one more year. Gentlemen of 1972, enjoy your annual draught. TMQ feels confident you will continue to sip champagne each autumn until you are called to meet the football gods, and greeted by song and feasting.

Note: I just reproduced the above item from my AutoText, substituting only the name of the last undefeated team, the field where it fell and the moment when the clock zeroed out. For every year TMQ has existed, I have reproduced that item from my AutoText, substituting only the year's particulars. Gentlemen of 1972, Tuesday Morning Quarterback feels confident I will continue to reproduce that item from my AutoText on an annual basis for seasons to come. My heirs might be reproducing it decades or centuries into the future. Note: I also reproduced that comment from AutoText, and as a reader noted last season at this juncture, my heirs cannot use the same item for "centuries" unless the 1972 Dolphins become true sports immortals.

And in sad, nauseating news, O.J. Simpson has confessed. There is no way on God's green Earth an innocent man, falsely accused, could put his name on a book in which he "imagines" what it "would" have been like to cut a helpless woman's throat. His acquittal might protect Simpson from jail, but it no longer protects his honor; Simpson himself has voided that by doing something that only a guilty man would even contemplate. Maybe at this point Simpson belongs in a treatment facility for the criminally insane -- but he does not belong in the Hall of Fame or on the wall at Ralph Wilson Stadium. His bust must immediately be removed from Canton and his name pulled down from that place of respect. Take a crowbar to them today. The fact that Fox and its publishing subsidiary just canceled the book and associated television show does not create any excuse for the National Football League. Any other course other than the removal of Simpson's bust from the Hall and his name from the stadium wall will put the NFL in a state of disgrace. Once the bust and the name are gone, sandblast the areas to get the filth off.

<http://sports.espn.go.com/espn/print?id=2669830&type=Page2Story&imagesPrint=off>

<http://sports.espn.go.com/espn/print?id=2669830&type=Page2Story&imagesPrint=off>

**Stat of the Week No. 1:** New Orleans gained 595 yards, and lost.

**Stat of the Week No. 2:** Chicago and Indianapolis are a combined 4-0 at the Meadowlands; the Giants and Jets are a combined 5-5 there.

**Stat of the Week No. 3:** Cleveland has lost every home game to Pittsburgh in this century.

**Stat of the Week No. 4:** Trent Green and Rex Grossman combined for seven yards passing in the first half. Both their teams went on to win.

**Stat of the Week No. 5:** Minnesota lost despite holding Miami to minus-three yards rushing.

**Stat of the Week No. 6:** The Cincinnati defense has given up 1,025 yards in its past two outings.

**Stat of the Week No. 7:** In the Seattle-San Francisco game, the ball changed hands three times in 22 seconds.

**Stat of the Week No. 8:** LaDainian Tomlinson has 22 touchdowns in 10 games, putting him on a pace for a record-setting 35 touchdowns on the season.

**Stat of the Week No. 9:** In its past two games, San Diego has fallen behind by a combined 52-14, then outscored its opponents by a combined 70-16.

**Stat of the Week No. 10:** The Jacksonville defense has allowed five points per game on "Monday Night Football" and 16 points per game in all other games.

**Cheerleader of the Week** Reader Michael Rodriguez, an attorney from Lake Worth, Fla., nominates [Heather of the Carolina Top Cats](#) – who is also an attorney. According to her team bio, Heather has passed the state bar and is also training to run in the New York City Marathon. This is one focused, goal-oriented cheerleader! Rodriguez writes, "Can you imagine being her client, turning on the game and realizing your counselor is dancing at midfield on national television? Do you think she'd get continuances for hearings scheduled for Mondays on account of having to perform on 'Monday Night Football'? There are just so many questions I need answered." Your Honor, my lawyer will be here as soon as she finishes posing for the swimsuit calendar. Here are lawyer cheers:

*Sway to the left, sway to the right, res judicata keeps me up at night!*

*Briefcase, deposition, hearing, sidebar – call us if you're ever hit by an uninsured car!*

*CLASS action, CLASS action!*

**Sweet Play of the Week:** TMQ has tackled items this season

suggesting that when teams reach the goal line, they should spread the field with multiple wideouts, then simply run up the middle. Trailing Atlanta 7-3, Baltimore had third-and-goal on the Falcons' 2. The Ravens lined up four wide. Atlanta pulled five defenders way wide, and left no one between the center and tackle on the offensive left. Jamal Lewis then went straight ahead over left guard for the touchdown.

**Sweet Plays of the Week (Sweet Pair for the Trick or Treats):** Game tied at 10 early in the fourth quarter at New Orleans, the Bengals faced third-and-2 on their 40. Chad Johnson was supposed to run an "out." Carson Palmer was flushed from the pocket and scrambling. Johnson saw it, cut up the sidelines and waved his hand – touchdown – and Drew Brees' fantastic passing yardage was on its way to being irrelevant. Later, Cincinnati leading 24-10 and the Saints at midfield, rookie seventh-round draft pick Ethan Kilmer, pressed into duty, cut in front of a Saints receiver, intercepted the pass and returned it for the icing touchdown. After the score, as the hyperventilating Kilmer stood on the sideline in delirium, Johnson ran to get him a water bottle and sprayed water directly into Kilmer's mouth. Say what you will about Ocho Cinco – as of that sideline act, I like Chad Johnson.

**Sweet Defensive Stop of the Week:** Dallas led 21-14, but Indianapolis had second-and-3 on the Cowboys' 9 with three minutes remaining. "Let's eat dinner, you know the Colts will pull it out," I said to my boys. Run stuffed for one yard. Third-and-2, a rare Indianapolis total screw up – two receivers in the same place in the end zone practically collide as the pass approaches. Fourth-and-2, maybe there was defensive holding, but Dallas' coverage was so tight Peyton Manning couldn't find anyone. And I don't wish to alarm you, but Tony Romo now trails Manning by a half point, 100.5 to 100, for the best passer rating in the league this season.



Yes, Your Honor, my outfit is a bit devilish. But then, replevin can wait.

**Sour Play of the Week:** Baltimore leading 17-10, Atlanta faced third-and-4 on the Nevermores' 19 at the start of the fourth quarter. Michael Vick takes the snap, and – *never run backward!* – Vick retreated, spun, ran backward and finally stumbled under a horde of defenders at the Baltimore 36, for loss of 17. The Falcons knocked themselves out of field-goal range in the process, and had to punt. Sometimes the best play a quarterback can make is to throw the ball away! On its possession following the punt, Baltimore scored a touchdown to ice the game. Had Vick simply thrown the ball away, the next snap likely would have made the game 17-13.

**Sour Sequence of the Week:** The St. Louis at Carolina game was scoreless and tense until the Cats kicked a field goal late in the first half and everything then collapsed for Les Mouflons. On its possession after the kickoff, St. Louis surrendered two sacks, punted, then saw Carolina hit a 62-yard touchdown pass to Steve Smith shortly before intermission. The rest of the same was filler. Note: Once 4-1, the Rams have quietly lost five straight, despite Marc Bulger having thrown for 10 more touchdowns than interceptions.

**Sweet 'N' Sour Play No. 1:** Game scoreless, Indianapolis faced third-and-10 on the Dallas 23 with 16 seconds remaining in the first half. The Colts lined up with two wide receivers left. At the snap, both faked positioning themselves for screen blocks, while a tailback ran into the left flat. Then Reggie Wayne, the real intended receiver, shot up the left sideline, touchdown. That was a sweet play design. But all the Cowboys' defenders came up on the screen fake, leaving Wayne unguarded – *even though there were only 16 seconds remaining in the half*. When the half is almost over, where, oh where might the pass go? Maybe up the field! Failing to guard the end zone when the play was nearly certain to go to the end zone was sour.

**Sweet 'N' Sour Play No. 2:** Earlier this season, Jason Taylor, who has been playing like a linebacker in Miami's hybrid 3-4, saw a tight end sneaking into the flat, followed him, intercepted a short pass and returned it for a touchdown. Now it's Miami 17, Minnesota 13 with 3:39 remaining and the Vikings have the ball on the Marine Mammals' 47. Minnesota calls screen left; Taylor rushes left against very highly paid Hyperboreans tackle Bryant McKinnie; when McKinnie super-backpeddles as if he wants the Miami rusher to follow, Taylor senses a trick and turns around, seeing the screen man. Interception returned for a touchdown, icing the contest. That was sweet. From the point Taylor sensed the screen, the very highly paid McKinnie stopped trying to block him. After the interception McKinnie just stood there, making no attempt to chase the play. That was seriously sour.



Miami's cheer-babes were all worked up about Jason Taylor's play.

**Sweet 'N' Sour Play No. 3:** Early in his 510-yard passing day against Cincinnati, Brees threw a 72-yard touchdown strike off the flea-flicker. But the play was a sweet 'n' sour foreshadowing: Brees heave-hoed into triple coverage, and it was only luck that the result was a touchdown rather than an interception. Later, twice near the Bengals' goal line Brees would force the ball into coverage for interceptions, though both times settling for a field goal was attractive.

**Jax, Giants -- Are Either for Real?** Last night on "Monday Night Football," the Jaguars played no fewer than four first-round draft choice receivers: Kyle Brady, Matt Jones, Mercedes Lewis and Reggie Williams. The Jags also played two fourth-round draft choice receivers, George Wrihster

and TMQ favorite Ernest Wilford, plus undrafted free agent receiver Cortez Hankton. Bottom line? The four first-round big-bonus glamour boys combined for three receptions for 63 yards; the three little-known nonglamour receivers combined for 11 catches for 154 yards. And this wasn't because the Giants defense was choking up on the first-round guys, that's for sure. Last night's "Monday Night Football" game was a great object lesson in the reality that high-drafted players often expend much of their energy sulking, complaining and demanding the ball, while low-drafted and undrafted players expend their energy working to earn the ball.

Otherwise the "Monday Night Football" game seemed a study in mood swings. Jax can obviously play when it wants to, having steam-cleaned Pittsburgh and Jersey/A in prime time on national television. But the Jaguars have also lost twice to Houston, which makes them difficult to take seriously, and are a listless 1-3 away from Alltel Stadium. The Giants looked hot a month ago, but now have delivered two straight lethargic performances, and Eli Manning seems to be reverting to being a true freshman at Mississippi. TMQ loves Tiki Barber, TTNYP ("The Toast of New York"), but at this point it's clear his announcement of a year-end retirement has become a distraction. For the last few weeks, the national media have been all over Tiki and his twin Ronde. For Ronde that's OK, distractions don't matter much when your club is 3-7 and rebuilding. But Jersey/A is in a playoff push. Here's my proposal: Tiki, stop doing media for the rest of the year. Concentrate on the game. Prove that you're all about the team, not yourself. It will help the Giants, and further burnish your reputation.

Play of the game: Maurice Jones-Drew walking into the end zone standing up for an untouched touchdown, making it Jaguars 23, Giants 10 in the fourth quarter and causing your columnist to close the light for bed. At the point of attack, guard Chris Naeole trap-pulled and pancaked Antonio Pierce, who's a good player. One of the problems with the Pro Bowl is that offensive linemen make it almost exclusively on rep, not performance. In the last two years, Naeole has been one of the league's best guards. Ticket to Hawaii for him, please.

**Dumbest Browns Play Since Dwayne Rudd Threw His Helmet:** Cleveland leading 10-0 with 54 seconds remaining until intermission, the Browns' Daven Holly intercepted a Ben Roethlisberger pass and returned the ball inside the Steelers' 5. Back up the field behind the action, Cleveland reserve defensive end Simon Fraser slammed into Roethlisberger trying to hurt him, then slammed him again. Then after Roethlisberger fell and tried to stand up, Fraser slammed him a third time. The roughing penalty spotted the ball way back at the Steelers' 44, and Cleveland did not score. Pittsburgh ultimately rallied to win by four points in the closing seconds, meaning basically this mindless attempt to injure the opposing quarterback cost Cleveland the game – and ought to cost Fraser his spot on the Browns' roster. First, there's a highly specific rule that says that during a turnover, defenders who become blockers may not hit the quarterback unless he is trying to make the tackle. Second, it's hard to believe Romeo Crennel coaches his players to attempt to injure. Third, Fraser is a nobody who has never started a game in his career – what makes him think his own petty belligerence is more important than the team? If Cleveland doesn't cut Fraser, at least the NFL should suspend him.

**TMQ Was So Ahead of the Maori War Dance Fad:** Last week the Wall Street Journal ran a Page 1 article about the football team of Trinity High School of Texas, archival of Permian High (subject of the book "Friday Night Lights"). Topic of the article? Trinity High is now doing the haka, a Maori war dance, before games. (This is the fourth or fifth time this fall that some aspect of high school football has been on the front page of the New York Times, Washington Post or Wall Street Journal!) The story explained that Trinity got the idea in 2004 by seeing, in an Internet football column, an item about the New Zealand rugby team that does the haka before games; the

Internet column included a link to a video of the dance, the newspaper noted. Hey Wall Street Journal, next time spell out that the haka item and video link appeared in Tuesday Morning Quarterback. Here, watch the [New Zealand All Blacks perform](#) a haka taparahi prior to a 2004 rugby match against the French national team.

**Since the Bikini Is Now Routine and Topless Is Oh-Hum on European Beaches What, Exactly, Is Left to Shock With?** Tuesday Morning Quarterback would show misplaced priorities if I let 2006 pass without noting this year is the 60th anniversary of the bikini, designed to celebrate the end of World War II and putting the atomic bomb into bombshell. (The suit's name comes from Bikini Atoll, site of a heavily publicized atomic bomb test in the summer of 1946, just as bikinis were hitting French beaches.) Fashion writer Kelly Bensimon supposes in her new "The Bikini Book" that the bikini is popular not in spite of being scandalous but *because* it is scandalous – bikinis allow a woman to broadcast a lewd and bawdy image without actually doing anything lewd or bawdy. Today, when some young actresses won't take a movie role unless the script specifies their clothes hit the floor, it is charming to remember that the 1956 film "And God Created Woman" was marketed on the fact that Brigitte Bardot briefly strutted around in a bikini. Today Bardot would be expected to play volleyball in her bikini! I hope you didn't miss this [Mary Buckheit article on Page 2](#), in which she asks whether bikini beach volleyball has become too sexy to be taken seriously as a sport. Mary – bikini beach volleyball is a sport? Gosh, that never even occurred to me.

**Maroon Zone Play of the Week:** Leading 7-0, New England faced fourth-and-1 on the Green Bay 39, went for it, converted and scored a touchdown on the possession. Eight different Flying Elvii players caught, carried or were thrown to on the drive, including linebacker Mike Vrabel on a trick-play attempt.

**Best 99-Yard Drive:** San Diego went 99 yards in 11 plays, six of them rushes. LaDainian Tomlinson ended the drive going in standing up for an untouched touchdown. (The Chargers actually gained 104 yards on the drive, overcoming a penalty.)

**Future Medical Researchers Lament: If Only People of 2006 Had Known the Benefits of Coffee and Twinkies:** That researchers have been studying the health effects of coffee for decades and still can't figure out whether it is good or bad for you is an indicator of the limits of certainty in medical knowledge. Some studies suggest coffee reduces the risk of heart disease, diabetes and cirrhosis; some studies say coffee increases the risk of stress, high blood pressure and sleep disorders; other studies say coffee in moderation has no discernible health impact. Comes now this [Norwegian study](#) suggesting coffee is a better antioxidant than blueberries, raspberries and similarly touted fruits and veggies. Study subjects who consumed "high intake of a variety of antioxidant-rich plant products such as walnuts, pomegranates, blueberries, blackberries, ginger, fruit and berry juices, green tea, kiwi fruits, tomatoes, spices, blue potatoes, blue broccoli and red cabbage" turned out to receive about the same antioxidant benefits as those who simply drank a few cups of coffee daily.

**Best Blocks:** Tennessee leading 10-6 on the Flaming Thumbtacks' opening possession of the second half, Philadelphia's defense was taking the field for its first series since learning, in the locker room, that Donovan McNabb was out for the season. Travis Henry went 70 yards up the middle for the touchdown on the first play, breaking open the game. And yes, they'd just heard McNabb was out, but the Eagles' defenders had stacked eight in the box on this down – and still allowed themselves to be blown backward by the Titans' offensive line. Cheer-babe note: Last week TMQ detailed the almost one-to-one relationship between how much the Philadelphia Cheerleaders wear and whether the home team wins. Kickoff temperature 50 degrees, the Eagles cheer-babes

danced in the first half in miniskirts, and the game was close despite the injury to McNabb. When the cheerleaders came out to start the second half in loose-fitting track suits – not the sprayed-on leotards they've worn in recent years in similar weather – TMQ knew that even the Philadelphia pep squad had given up on the game.

**Worst Blocks:** The Rams' offensive line not only allowed seven sacks, including a safety – on every sack, TMQ spied at least one offensive lineman who was doing nothing, simply standing there watching as Marc Bulger went down. I am constantly amazed by how many NFL plays there is at least one man standing around doing nothing whatsoever. Sloth on snap after snap was displayed by the Rams' offensive line at Carolina.

**I Hate Julie!** For Northeast dwellers like me, holiday travel season brings calls to Amtrak, and that means talking to "Julie," the infuriating, sickly sweet automated voice of the nation's tax-subsidized rail carrier. "Julie" pretends to be your friend, but you must listen to her read long stretches of boilerplate before she'll let you speak to a real human being – and Amtrak insults your intelligence by making you say "agent, agent, agent, agent, agent, agent, agent, agent," over and over before "Julie" finally intones, "Would you like to speak to an agent?" Has even one single traveler ever actually used "Julie" to book a train ticket? Here is TMQ's 2006 desultory conversation with "Julie" – bearing in mind that Congress expropriates money from your pocket to pay for her:

JULIE: I'll be able to help you. Let's get started.

ME: Ontologically, I cannot start unless I know where I must end.

JULIE: Sorry. I didn't understand.

ME: Obviously you didn't go to college.

JULIE: Are you interested in a one-way or round trip?

ME: We are all on a one-way trip.

JULIE: Sorry. Could you repeat that?

ME: Julie, I would like you to take me places I have never been.

JULIE: No problem. If you decide you want to return, we can take care of that later.

ME: I'd like two tickets to paradise.

JULIE: What city would you like to start from?

ME: Sumer. That is where human civilization started.

JULIE: I think you said, "Seattle train station."

*Later*

JULIE: You need to say what kind of people will be traveling.

ME: It's me -- the passenger is worldly, debonair, irresistible to women, vaguely noir-ish in an impermanent, contingent sort of way.

JULIE: I'm having trouble understanding you.

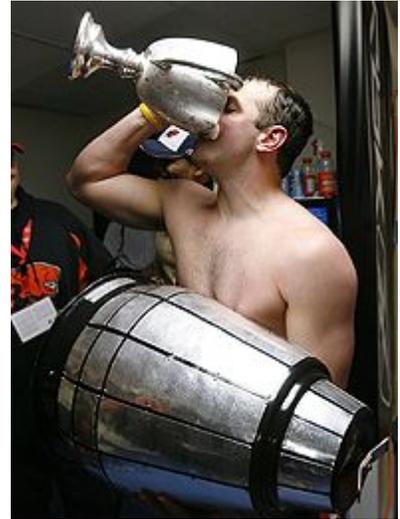
ME: Why don't we meet for a drink in the lounge car and I'll explain.

JULIE: I'd better connect you to an agent.

**NFL Network Update:** Honchos of startup NFL Network must have been sweating bullets as Oakland came within seconds of upsetting Kansas City, which would have reduced the allure of NFLN's first-ever live game, Kansas City-Denver on Thanksgiving night. So many NFL Network ads ran during the Fox and CBS football broadcasts on Sunday that viewers must have thought Budweiser, Coors and Miller all went out of business on the same day. Honchos on Park Avenue must have been steaming when the Washington Post television section for this week did not list the Denver-Kansas City game under its "football" heading, because the broadcast will be available in the nation's capital only to DirecTV and premium-digital subscribers. One of the NFL Network ads

showed Denver owner Pat Bowlen in his office, seemingly preparing for the game. Perhaps you thought: Hmm, an owner participating in an advertisement, that's unusual. Bowlen, more than any NFL owner, wants the league to take over its own broadcasting, cutting out the established networks when the current contracts expire. Bowlen has wagered a lot of his corridor reputation on the idea that NFL Network will work. You bet he's helping out with the ads. But did he get an appearance fee?

**They Never Punt on Fourth-and-1 in the CFL:** Congratulations to the British Columbia Lions, winner of the CFL's 94th Grey Cup. Lions players broke the Grey Cup itself while waving it around after the game – but after 94 years, they needed a new one anyway. And you'd think it would be too cold in Vancouver for triangle top swimsuits, but you'd think wrong: Here is cheerleader [Kelsey of the Felions](#), who is honest enough to admit her favorite sport is hockey. (Excuse me, favourite sport.) All British Columbia Lions cheerleaders' team bio pages include a declaration of their favorite things to do "in the lower mainland," which in frostback talk means the area south of Horseshoe Bay, at the base of the Sea to Sky Highway. If you haven't been to Vancouver, B.C., you've missed one of the most beautiful cities-amidst-nature settings on our Earth.



Their Grey Cup runneth over. Note to female and nontraditional male readers -- two beefcake photos in one week.

**Preposterous Punt Watch:** Game tied at 7 in the first quarter, New Orleans faced fourth-and-2 on the Cincinnati 40. Last week the Saints went buck-buck-brawckkkkkkk on fourth-and-6 on the Steelers' 39 in the fourth quarter, and this turned out the deciding play in their loss. Surely they won't repeat the mistake! Drew Brees brought his team to the line, yelled "hut hut" numerous times, and then took the penalty when no Trick or Treats jumped offside. The punt that followed officially might have been on fourth-and-7, but to my mind it was a Preposterous Punt on fourth-and-2, since the Saints were never going for it. Plus I haven't seen the fourth-down hut-hut draw-them-off nonsense work in the NFL in about 10 seasons.

**Stop Me Before I Blitz Again! No. 1:** Joey Galloway's 34-yard touchdown reception, which broke open the Washington-City of Tampa game, came against an eight-man Redskins' blitz. Column after column, TMQ documents that seven- and eight-man blitzes are like handing out engraved invitations to score touchdowns. When the Bucs ran a complex reverse for a five-yard gain early in the first quarter, the Fox announcers grumbled mightily about how there's no point in a reverse that only gains five yards. Yes there is! TMQ's law of reverses holds that any reverse that gets back to the line of scrimmage is a positive play – because it spooks the defense, slowing the rush. Washington recorded no sacks in the game, despite facing a rookie quarterback with two rookies on his offensive line.

**Stop Me Before I Blitz Again! No. 2:** The Ming Ding Xiong ("Bears whose outcomes are decided by fate" in Chinese) leading 3-0 on the first play of the fourth quarter, Jersey/B blitzed seven – easy 43-yard touchdown pass to Mark Bradley for the game's icing points. Blitzing once in a while can be devastating; blitzing a lot, as the Jets did Sunday, nearly guarantees the opponent an easy touchdown at some point. The Jets' constant no-huddle, which seemed clever when Eric "I Was a Teenaged Coach" Mangini rolled it out in October, now seems stale. Watching the game I regularly thought, a la Monty Python, "I felt that was a bit predictable." Note: According to the NFL, on Sunday the Jets [played at Giants Stadium](#).



Spamalot is playing on Broadway, which is in New York not New Jersey, and anyway the cast felt the Jets' performance was a bit predictable.

**Stop Me Before I Blitz Again! No. 3:** Lee Evans' first 83-yard touchdown catch came against a seven-man blitz; his second 83-yard touchdown catch, against a five-man blitz. On the second Evans' bomb, Houston had its free safety lined up 25 yards off the line at the snap – it looked like he was expecting to field a punt – yet still couldn't catch the deep man.

**Cheerleader Professionalism Watch:** Reader Kevin of Rochester, N.Y., notes that for Buffalo at Houston, the Texans' cheerleaders wore conservative outfits, and the home team lost. Not far away in the same weather, Cowboys cheerleaders wore hardly anything for Indianapolis at Dallas, and the home team won. Reader Will Woods of New York City notes that Yale's cheerleaders stayed in miniskirts throughout the Harvard-Yale game, while Harvard cheerleaders changed to track suits at halftime. Needless to say, Yale won, sharing the Ivy League title with Princeton, which had its biggest season since 1964. Saturday night at Princeton, they [lit The Bonfire on Cannon Green](#) for the first time in 12 years, signifying Princeton had swept Harvard and Yale.

**Redundancy Watch:** Reader Will Gray of Tennessee notes that FedEx, official name of the company that originally was named Federal Express, now has a [FedEx express](#) division. That is, Federal Express express.

**At Happy Hour in Hell's Sports Bar, There Are No Nachos – But Unlimited Free Celery:** Hell's sports bar has 28 wide-screen plasma TVs, and on Sunday all were showing Detroit at Arizona, especially the Lions reaching first-and-goal on the Cardinals' 1, then losing yardage on three consecutive snaps. For the highlight program, all 28 screens in Hell's Sports Bar showed nothing but, over and over, Green Bay punting on fourth-and-1 in the fourth quarter when down 28-0.

**We're All Professionals Here:** Having rallied to pull within 20-14 at San Francisco, defending NFC champion Seattle faced fourth-and-1 on its 37 at the two-minute warning, holding all three timeouts. Electronic Arts-cover-cursed Shaun Alexander was stopped for a loss, Niners ball. On the first San Francisco snap, Frank Gore fumbled, Seattle ball. On the first Seattle snap, sack. On the second Seattle snap, interception.

**Darling, You Look Lovely in That Strapless Miami Dolphins Evening Gown:** The NFL granted permission to coaches Nolan the Younger of San Francisco and Jack of the River of Jacksonville to wear business suits on the sideline. For years, coaching staffs have been required to wear NFL-licensed apparel, which means golf shirts, varsity sweaters and so on. Last year on NFL.com, I

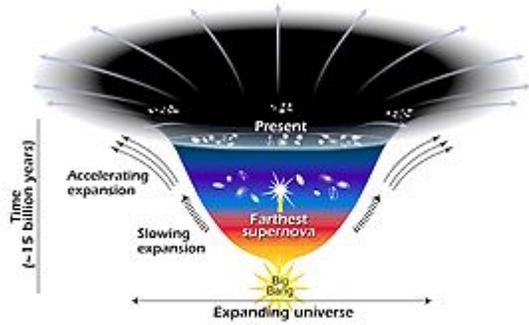
proposed a solution – [NFL-licensed business suits](#). I wrote, "Imagine walking into your next business meeting nattily attired in a three-piece Denver Broncos business suit with a bright orange stripe up the side. Imagine a tuxedo with tiny Philadelphia Eagles' logos as trim, or a women's power suit in the colors of the New England Patriots. Of course this idea is completely ridiculous, Americans aren't so crazy about the NFL that they would actually wear suits with team logos on them – 'Sweetheart, get me NFL Properties on the phone fast.' If only I'd been sharp enough to sign with the NFL for a commission on this idea! Because now there are NFL-licensed [men's dress blazers](#) in team colors. Reebok note: The NFL-approved apparel that Marty Schottenheimer and other San Diego coaches wore on the Denver sideline Sunday night was not San Diego colors. Bolts' coaches were adorned in gray and off-white. Huh?

**Another Way In Which Dogs in America Live Better Than People in Parts of the Developing World:** One breakthrough in antibiotics is a class of chemicals called cephalosporins, which kill both gram-positive and gram-negative bacteria, yet have minimal side effects. Discovered in 1948 by an Italian chemist, cephalosporins – most common trade name Keflex – were not widely available until the 1970s. By the 1980s, word was out on this drug's combination of effectiveness and minimal risk. Parents began saying, "Doctor, please give my child Keflex." Why do I mention all this? First, this is Tuesday Morning Quarterback: I don't have to have a reason. Second, recently I took Geneva, the brainless Official Dog of TMQ, to the vet. And they gave her – Keflex. From miracle drug for people to pills for the dog! The problem is that in many parts of the developing world, parents still plead, "Doctor, please give my child Keflex." American parents might soon plead, "Doctor, please give my child Claforan or Cefcatocol," these being advanced cephalosporins that work against the antibiotic-resistant germ strains found in hospitals. How long before American dogs get Cefcatocol while developing-world patients still plead for Keflex?

**Best Purist Drive:** Trailing Oakland 13-10, Kansas City took possession on its 20 with 4:53 remaining – and rather than go pass-wacky, ran on six of 11 plays, scoring the winning touchdown at 1:54. On fourth-and-1 at their 29 with 3:28 remaining, the Chiefs didn't punt, they didn't panic and throw. They ran the ball up the middle.

**Huh? What?** TMQ's Law of the Obvious holds: Sometimes all a team needs to do is run the ball for no gain, and everything will be fine. Leading 21-17, Houston faced third-and-2 on its 19 on the first play following the two-minute warning, with Buffalo down to its last timeout. The Texans threw incomplete, stopping the clock, then punted; the Bills scored the winning touchdown with nine seconds remaining. Had Houston simply run for no gain, victory was likely. Instead the Moo Cows stopped the clock, keeping Buffalo alive. Every week there is one play TMQ watches over and over in rapt fascination, and this week this one was it. To top it off, with 2:25 remaining, Buffalo had punted on fourth-and-4 from midfield. "It's like the coaches are competing to see who can make the stupidest call," my 11-year-old, Spenser, commented. Houston won that competition.

**Missing Universe Watch:** As TMQ regularly notes, physicists remain unable to locate the bulk of the cosmos, which is believed locked up in undetectable dark energy and dark matter. As the academic cosmologist Lee Smolin notes in his important new book "The Trouble with Physics," only about 4 percent of the universe is confirmed as ordinary matter and energy, and "of the other 96 percent, we know absolutely nothing." We can't find 96 percent of the universe – but trust us, we're experts! Last week NASA said Hubble Telescope images of the movements of the galaxies suggested that dark energy did not become significant until the cosmos was about five billion years old. This sort-a makes sense. Gravity grows more powerful as distance decreases, dark energy appears to be an antigravity force that grows more powerful as distance increases – so the expanding universe had to fly apart for a few eons until the galaxies achieved enough distance from each other for dark energy to come into play. If this thinking is correct, with each passing epoch the galaxies will be still farther apart, and thus dark energy more powerful. But, um, we still have no idea what dark energy is or how it operates. Last week NASA also estimated that [the firmament is 70 percent dark energy](#), 25 percent dark matter, and 5 percent everything else. So we can't even agree on whether 95 percent or 96 percent of the entire universe is missing. But trust us, we're experts!



This diagram reveals changes in the rate of expansion since the universe's birth 15-billion years ago. The more shallow the curve, the faster the rate of expansion. The curve changes noticeably about 7.5 billion years ago, when objects in the universe began flying apart at a faster rate. Astronomers theorize that the faster expansion rate is due to a mysterious, dark force that is pushing galaxies apart.

Ten years ago no one even knew dark energy existed, and already NASA thinks it can explain the origin of the universe in a PowerPoint.

Meanwhile [this new study](#) appears to rule out speculation that much of the missing matter is present in deep space as MACHOS, or massive compact halo objects. The hypothesized MACHOS were thought to be extremely large numbers of ancient, dead stars on the boundaries of galaxies. It was assumed by some cosmologists that MACHOS eventually would be shown to be the most common objects in the universe, just hard to find because they long ago stopped producing light. But an international collaboration of astronomers, working under the project title Eros – acronym of the French name Expérience de Recherche d'Objets Sombres – failed to detect any sign of ancient, burned-out stars in the Magellanic Clouds, the "dwarf galaxies" close to our Milky Way. So for the moment, MACHOS seem out as an explanation for the missing mass. And yes, in this case Eros defeated MACHO.

**Beyond Platform Shoes:** Watch closely when NBC shows its booth stand-up view of John Madden and Al Michaels during Sunday night contests. Though their heads are even, Michaels' belt appears far higher than Madden's, as if Michaels had an NBA-style physique with super-long legs and high waist. What's going on is that Madden is quite a bit taller than Michaels – who is standing on a riser, to make them appear the same height. Michaels is also closest to the camera, which aids the illusion.

**Are You Dissatisfied With Your Auto Insurance If You Don't Have a Crash:** Recently I saw a television ad for life insurance from a company called People's Benefit Life. The pitchman promised, "Satisfaction guaranteed or your money back!" Presumably the only way to ensure satisfaction for a life insurance policy is if your heirs receive the due payment in a timely manner. That only happens when you die. So if you fail to die, claim dissatisfaction and demand your money back! Note: The ideal outcome for all insurance premiums is that they are wasted. Ideally every

dime you spend on car and health insurance should be waste, if you never have a problem about which to file a claim. If only all life insurance costs could be wasted.

**Local Affiliate Asleep at the Switch:** WUSA, the CBS affiliate in Washington, D.C. aired Cincinnati at New Orleans, an excellent matchup, in the 1 p.m. ET slot. By late fourth quarter when it was Bengals 31, Saints 16, the contest was over. Yet the local affiliate stayed with every last sleep-inducing snap even as Pittsburgh at Cleveland, with WUSA also had rights to, became a red-hot fantastic finish.

**Pittsburgh Comeback Analysis:** So Ben Roethlisberger had thrown three interceptions in the game, though two bounced off receivers' hands. So one was run back for Roethlisberger's third interception-return touchdown of the season, which is embarrassing. So Roethlisberger has thrown a league-worst 17 interceptions, and trails Jon Kitna and J.P. Losman in passer rating. So the defending champions are 3-6 and down 13-3 in the fourth quarter. Still, *these are the Pittsburgh Steelers*. Taking possession with 13:42 remaining, Roethlisberger led the Steelers on an 87-yard touchdown drive that including converting a third-and-20. Now the score is only 13-10, but Cleveland returns the ensuing kickoff for a touchdown. Still, *these are the Pittsburgh Steelers*. Taking over again, Roethlisberger led the Steelers on a 17-play, 79-yard touchdown drive. Getting the ball back, Cleveland went three-and-out and politely threw incomplete, stopping the clock. Roethlisberger leads the Steelers on a 77-yard touchdown drive that won the game with 39 seconds remaining. Counting penalties and excluding kick returns, in the fourth quarter Pittsburgh ran 38 plays for 243 yards, while Cleveland ran 10 plays for 35 yards. And the Browns were playing at home before the NFL's most energetic crowd!

Tactics note: Game scoreless in the first half, Cleveland faced fourth-and-1 on the Pittsburgh 26, attempted a field goal and missed. Normally TMQ's immutable law Kick Early Go For It Late would say this is the right call, though rain and a gusty wind made the kick problematic. Anyway you can't dance with the champ, you've got to knock him down! Pittsburgh is the Super Bowl champion; Cleveland had lost six straight at home to the Steelers; victories don't come in the mail, they must be seized.

**Wacky Concierge of the Week:** Last week on a business trip, TMQ stayed at the swank Sofitel near the Water Tower in Chicago. Its directory offered a Sofitel Romance Concierge. Guests were urged to order a "customized romantic experience" arranged "with the assistance of our Emily Post Institute-trained Romance Concierges" who are "specially qualified to help you plan any kind of romantic occasion." I've always longed for a customized romantic experience! The hotel's romance packages included champagne, scented lotions and "chocolate body paint and whipped cream" sent up to the room. At the Emily Post Institute, they teach you how to advise couples on ways to use whipped cream in hotel rooms? But then Sofitel is a French hotel company.

Swank hotel note: With the advent of cell phones, people don't use hotel long-distance that much anymore. At the Sofitel, I made four two-minute weekend phone calls from Chicago to Maryland – and they were billed at \$8.99 each. Good grief! If you ever stay at a Sofitel, for goodness sake do not pick up the telephone. Chicago note: On Saturday night, *November 18th*, the city's Christmas parade marched up Michigan Avenue.

**ESPN Name Too Long, Marketers Fret:** Washington state adopted "Experience Wa" [as its tourism slogan](#), apparently assuming that with current trends in literacy, people can no longer remember entire words. Washington has [two state songs, a state fossil, a state dance, a state tartan and a state grass](#).

**San Diego at Denver Comeback Analysis:** "The Chargers have them right where they want them," Spenser said as he went to bed with the Broncos leading 24-7. And it was so true. When the Bolts left the field 35-27 victors, I thought, "Six weeks to go, this is the team to beat in the NFL."

**TMQ Law of Comebacks holds:** Defense starts comebacks, offense stops them. From midway in the third quarter when the home team took its 24-7 lead, the visitors held Denver to one field goal and five first downs. This was at Denver, where oxygen depletion is supposed to confer on the Broncos an incredible second-half advantage. After San Diego scored to make it 24-14, Denver went incompleting, incompleting, incompleting, punt – the kind of series that would never make a highlight reel, but is integral to the comeback. After San Diego scored to make it 24-21, Denver reached first-and-10 on the Chargers' 18. A touchdown for the home team, and "offense stops comebacks" takes over. Instead Denver went incompleting, three-yard run, fumbled snap, field goal. As the field goal split the uprights for a 27-21 Denver lead, TMQ wrote the words "game over" in his notebook – "over" meaning San Diego would win – and went to bed.

**Most Fun Play:** Denver leading 24-14, San Diego faced third-and-2 at midfield at the end of the third. The Bolts lined up in what seemed like a flag football formation, quarterback Philip Rivers in the shotgun with a back on either side exactly at his depth. Denver zone-blitzed six, defensive end Ebenezer Ekuban dropping into coverage in the defensive left flat to compensate for a blitzing corner on that side. LaDainian Tomlinson ran a down-and-in – what traditionalists call a "replace route" – against Ekuban. Tomlinson easily shot past the defensive end, catching a 51-yard touchdown pass. Think about what happened on this play. To this point, Tomlinson has scored 20 touchdowns, almost twice as many as the next best player in the league. Yet the man who has to this point scored 20 touchdowns is *covered deep by a defensive end*. There was no safety help in sight – John Lynch had to cover a wide receiver because of the blitz, and had his back to Tomlinson the entire time.

**Three San Diego-Denver comeback notes:** First, Denver came into the game with the fewest points allowed, and surrendered 35 points at home. Until Sunday night, the Broncos had been playing a very disciplined, conventional 4-3; against San Diego they blitzed, stunted and jumped around like mad, and you can see what good it did them. (I don't wish to alarm anyone, but New England just passed Denver and now rivals Chicago for fewest points allowed.) Second, the game offered numerous examples of how Denver has adjusted its dive-at-the-legs chop-block scheme to achieve quasi-legality. Between the tackles in the NFL, a blocker can dive at legs so long as the defender is not already "engaged" with another blocker. Example: Second quarter, unknown interchangeable Broncos running back Damien Nash goes up the middle for 26 yards. On the play, Denver center Tom Nalen first hits San Diego nose tackle Jamal Williams, then slides off him to the right just as left guard Ben Hamilton dives low at Williams' legs. Legal play: Nalen released Williams the instant before Hamilton chopped his legs. Sportsmanlike? That's another matter.

Third note: In the fourth quarter, Rivers heave-hoed a crazy pass attempt under tackle, and it fluttered in the air for a likely interception. Little-known Bolts receiver Vincent Jackson sprinted like mad toward the ball and leapt to knock it away from a defender. All too few NFL receivers seem to care that when the pass is bad, it is their responsibility to become instant defensive backs. Jackson cared – and in the fourth quarter, the football gods rewarded him with a touchdown reception.

**Actual Staples Advertisement:** Free shredder with your next purchase.

**A Miracle of Engineering:** The gigantic new Hummer H3 weighs hundreds of pounds more than a Lincoln Town Car and is a foot taller, yet nonetheless manages to be cramped inside. "The cabin seems too small for a vehicle with such a hulking interior," the *Wall Street Journal* reported. "Headroom is poor and narrow windows limit visibility." The back seat is especially cramped, with five inches less leg room than a Town Car. Plus the EPA rates the new Hummer as one of the [worst air-pollution offenders on the road](#). Absurdly big on the outside, uncomfortably small on the inside: only in America!

**Obscure College Score of the Week:** Delta State 17, Elizabeth City State 10 (Division II playoffs). Located in Elizabeth City, N.C., Elizabeth City State's sports teams are the Vikings – missing their chance to be the Betties. Not even the women's teams are the Betties, rather, the Lady Vikings. Since Vikings rape and pillage how, exactly, is this done in a ladylike fashion?

**Obscure College Score of the Week No. 2:** Capital 32, Wittenberg 14 (Division III playoffs). Located in Columbus, Ohio, Capital University [forbids burning incense in dorm rooms](#). The school runs freshman blogs on its official Web site. [Here is April Haviland's blog](#).

**Reader Animadversion:** Got a complaint or a deeply held grievance? Write me at [TMQ\\_ESPN@yahoo.com](mailto:TMQ_ESPN@yahoo.com). Include your real name and the name of your hometown, and I may quote you by name unless you instruct me otherwise. Note: giving your hometown improves your odds of being quoted.

Wednesday, November 22, 2006

TMQ Nation fires back

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By Gregg Easterbrook

What color was Jax wearing on "Monday Night Football?" It may have looked black, but as noted by several readers including **Doreen Kenworth of Harrisburg, Pa.** the color was Brunswick Green. The old Pennsylvania Railroad painted locomotives a color that sure looked black, but the company insisted on calling it Brunswick Green. Marklin still makes authentic toy Pennsylvania Railroad locomotives [in Brunswick Green](#), and they sure look black.

**Martin Möller of Bonn, Germany** writes of the EA Sports cover curse plaguing Shaun Alexander: "EA produces a series of Futbol (the sport you call soccer) video games. There is a manager version and a player version. The coach on the cover of the manager version is Thomas Doll of HSV Hamburg. In the previous year HSV played its best season in a decade. In the 12 games of this season since the video game was released, HSV had only one win. That's what I call a curse." [Here is the link to EA Germany](#).

TMQ mused on how a crew of 14 could handle a container ship as large as the 191,000-ton *Emma Maersk*. **Mike McBride of København, Denmark** writes, "I work in København, which is Copenhagen in Danish, for Maerskline, the top container shipping company in the world. We are already building seven sister vessels for the *Emma Maersk* -- the next, the *Estelle Maersk*, is now leaving Denmark to join Emma on the high seas. Anyway you wondered if the day would come when Emma might crash into the Golden Gate Bridge. This particular nightmare scenario is unlikely, since the Emma is dedicated to the Asia-Europe trade. She is so big, she can't call at most ports in the United States, or fit through the Panama Canal. Today, at least. The world is preparing for mega-ships: American ports are beginning to dredge their channels, and Panama has begun their canal expansion program to accommodate outsized vessels." **Doug Marshak of Duluth, Minn.** adds, "At least in the United States, most ports employ ship pilots who are brought aboard freighters once they approach ports to guide the vessels through the dredged channels. The entire Great Lakes must be navigated by a Great Lakes pilot -- foreign ship captains are not allowed to drive their ships upon entering the Great Lakes. So while the crew may be a bunch of undertrained exhausted low-bidder non-unionized workers, once they hit American waters the guy (or, increasingly, the woman) driving the ship is a specialist on local waters and subject to good-old OSHA regulations on consecutive hours worked without rest. Furthermore, a vessel as huge as the *Emma Maersk* would run aground if it left its dredged shipping lane, running aground long before it could smash into most structures. I suppose it is possible that a runaway container ship could take out the Golden Gate Bridge, but with the pilot system in place and vessels confined to dredged lanes the public can't see, at least in the United States the risk of such an accident is low."



Yes, Mr. Doll doesn't look like a happy man.

**Jaimie Muehlhausen of Vista, Calif.** asks an excellent question: Since even the victors agree that officials blew their calls at the end of the Oklahoma-Oregon game, why isn't this game treated as a victory for Oklahoma in BCS calculations?

Apparently I should not have turned off Denver-San Diego after the Bolts' win became obvious. First, TMQ had noted the sort of play on which Denver skirts the anti-chop-block rule and hides the intent-to-injure tactics of its offensive line. **Sarath Krishnaswamy of Dunstable, Mass.** was among many readers to point out, "I was surprised you did not mention the hit Denver center Tom Nalen put on Igor Olshansky of San Diego, for which the latter retaliated with fists, drawing an ejection. Nalen dove low and hit Olshansky's knees when Denver was spiking the ball. That is -- on a play Nalen knew was meaningless and where the defense posed no threat, he deliberately went after an opposing player with intent to cause injury. And yet, for this Olshansky is ejected while Nalen skates." Now I've seen the tape, and the reason only Olshansky was flagged is the classic second-swing problem -- the official doesn't notice the first swing, he notices the second. Of course Olshansky was wrong to take a swing, and deserves the \$10,000 fine the league meted out. But Nalen's move was an obvious attempt to injure. Why even bother when the game is almost over? The Broncos play the Chargers again in December. Nalen was fined \$25,000, but should have been suspended. Right now Denver team officials are complaining that the larger fine against Nalen was unfair. Mike Shanahan: Your offensive line plays dirty, and you're complaining about being caught?!



Don't worry, the Golden Gate is not in danger.

**Arthur Bergmann of Newport Beach, Calif.** adds that leading 28-27 with second-and-goal at the Denver 1 at the two-minute warning, Marty Schottenheimer had Philip Rivers kneel on the ball! Denver was out of timeouts, and the Bolts wanted to run as much clock as possible before scoring. LaDainian Tomlinson went over for the icing touchdown at 1:17, and the PAT kick made it 35-27. The Broncos were still alive to tie and force overtime, but because of the kneel-down, ran out of time, reaching only the San Diego 32 as the clock expired.

TMQ complained that it's tired of the "hut hut hut hut" attempt to draw the defense offside on fourth-and-1, plus it never works anyway. **Amish Patel of Dallas** suggested, "A team should try the fourth-down hut-hut draw-them-off nonsense on fourth down and short -- then, after several listless huts, suddenly snap the ball as the defense starts to relax." Or quick-snap while the defense is waiting for "hut hut hut hut" to commence, which is what New England did, successfully, against the Packers on fourth-and-1 on Sunday.

Lots of errors this week, all my fault. I called Eros a goddess. **Helen Wasiakowski of Sweet Valley, Pa.** was among many to correct that: "Eros was a god, usually associated with Aphrodite, the goddess of love. He's better known as Cupid through Roman mythology. And on an Eros-related note, thanks for yesterday's beefcake pictures!" I called cephalaxins a "class" of antibiotics. **Sachin Kapur, an M.D. in Chicago** writes, "Cephalaxin is actually the generic name for the antibiotic Keflex, not the name of the class. That class of medications, which would also include Cefcatocol, is called the cephalosporins. Other drugs in this class include Ceclor and Rocephin. Great column, and Go Bears!"

**Caitlin Peale of Portland, Maine** was among the surprisingly large number of readers who knew the details of haka dancing in New Zealand rugby: "You mention the All Blacks, New Zealand's national rugby union team, but the accompanying photo pictures the Kiwis, New Zealand's national rugby league team. Rugby union and rugby league are different codes of rugby with different rules that split from one another in England, Australia, and New Zealand around the turn of the 20th century. Yesterday you linked to a Kiwis' haka. Here is a picture of the [All Blacks performing a haka](#)."

**Kevin Lehde of N.C.**, a high school football official, suggests the reason the Giants seemed shocked when Devin Hester of the Bears ran a missed field goal back for a touchdown against them is that they thought they were playing a high school game! Under high school rules, any kick into the end zone is a touchback; you can never run the ball out. Lehde notes, "The fact that kicks can be run out of the end zone in the pros and college often translates into undeserved booing of officials in high school. The bedlam starts when a kick is touched, then rolls into the end zone, and a touchback is called. Fans want the ball to be live if it's been touched, but in high school, it's not. Example from an October game in which I was the back judge. A punt is going to be fielded at the 35-yard line, but the return man muffs it and the ball is loose. The coverage men try to recover, but end up kicking the ball backwards, toward the goal line. A melee ensues, during which the ball inches closer and closer, and finally bounces into the air and breaks the plane of the goal line. I immediately blow my whistle and signal touchback, while the kicking team falls on the ball in the end zone and the fans start screaming because they think it's a touchdown. The kicking team's coach was completely befuddled by the explanation: A kick remains a kick until it is possessed, not touched. Since the ball was batted around for 30 seconds without ever coming into possession, it was still a kick that crossed the goal line, and therefore a touchback."

Obscure College Score of the Week mentioned Capital University. **Marcia McGinley of Clearwater, Fla.** read the TMQ link to its FAQs page, and found that for dorm rooms, irons were both prohibited and recommended. "The youth of America, or at least of Columbus, Ohio, is wrinkled," she supposes. I complained that the Washington CBS affiliate, WUSA, stayed with the meaningless end of the Bengals-Saints game rather than switch to the red-hot Pittsburgh-Cleveland conclusion. **Erik Mooney of Jersey City, N.J.** wrote, "The problem is that the NFL does not allow local affiliates to switch away from regionally aired games until a team leads by at least 18 points." OK, that's the rule. But *why* is it the rule? Recently TMQ noted that some buildings now have Web sites. As **Steven Austin** points out, so do [some mountains](#). These mountains even have a help desk - [click on "live help."](#) And here's a traffic intersection with its own [Web site](#).

Readers including **Jolene Jasper of Bozeman, Mont.** asked how my off-price ultra-generic prediction, Home Team Wins, is faring. Not too well -- it's 88-72, which trails everyone but Chris Mortensen [on the ESPN prediction board](#). Three points: First, hey NFL page editors, how come the TMQ off-price ultra-generic prediction isn't on this page? Afraid I'll show you up? Second, Mort, just switch to predicting Home Team Wins, you don't need exclusive insider information and you don't even need to know who's playing. Third, note the computer formula, Accuscore, is doing better than all the experts. As I understand Accuscore, it simply endlessly predicts that the team with the best statistics will win.

Finally, coaches in suits went 2-for-2 this week, moving a reader to observe:

*San Fran and Jax wear suits. Much nicer than Pats' sweats. Sharp-dress man? Success.*

**-- Tammy Kelly, Independence, Mo.**



Jack Del Rio is dressed for success.

**Monday, November 27, 2006**

**Updated: November 28, 2:14 PM ET**

Hey coach, take responsibility!

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By Gregg Easterbrook

*Outcoached!* It's been the buzz phrase of the past few weeks, and this week several NFL coaches were significantly outcoached. None, however, admitted as much. Bear Bryant maintained that after a victory the players deserve the credit, and after a loss the coach deserves the blame. Today every NFL coach praises the Bear, then conveniently overlooks his maxim. At the least we should hold to the axiom "win as a team, lose as a team," and assume that in a loss the coaches must have coached poorly. There's no shame in this, since coaches have good games and bad games just as players do. But you'd never know that from NFL coaches. For them, somebody else is always to blame.

Lovie Smith made a critical bad call late in the Chicago at New England contest -- then, after the game, he blamed Rex Grossman, because Grossman threw interceptions. Jack Del Rio made two critical busted calls in the fourth quarter in the Jacksonville at Buffalo contest, then afterward blamed the loss on his players lacking fire. Andy Reid called a nutty play that backfired while the Eagles at Colts contest was close, and afterward did not blame his players, but also didn't say, "Boy, did I make a nutty call." Jim Mora of Atlanta made a succession of bad decisions, just days after his father blamed the Atlanta players! (Details on all these points to follow.) No one was more outcoached than Tom Coughlin of the Giants, who a week ago bristled when charged by Tiki Barber with being outcoached. At that time, Coughlin declared that members of the Giants' organization should not air their disputes in public. Then immediately after the loss to Tennessee, Coughlin blamed Eli Manning for throwing an interception.

Let's ponder the coaching aspect of the Giants' epic collapse. Jersey/A led 21-0 and had possession of the ball with 13 minutes remaining at Long Playing Field. Then Eli Manning threw an interception -- but *why were the Giants throwing with a 21-point lead in the fourth quarter?* Manning didn't decide on his own to throw, the coaches radioed that call directly into Eli's helmet. Leading by 21 points in the fourth quarter, do nothing but run up the middle for no gain for the rest of the game, and victory seems likely. Tennessee scores to make it 21-7; the Giants go three-and-out, throwing an incomplete pass to stop the clock. Tennessee scores to make it 21-14; the Giants punt with 3:13 remaining, after throwing an incomplete pass to stop the clock. Tennessee scores to make it 21-21; Jersey/A has the ball on its own 28 with 32 seconds remaining and throws another interception. From the point at which the Giants had a 21-0 lead and possession of the ball with 13 minutes remaining, Coughlin and his staff called seven passing plays -- which is seven too many. The result was both interceptions and incompletions that stopped the clock in a game Tennessee won with a field goal with six ticks left. *Maybe when you're ahead 21-0 in the fourth quarter you shouldn't be tossing the ball into the air?* The final interception was particularly bad coaching because at that point Tennessee had just rallied to tie, and momentum had shifted. All the emotion and crowd noise was on the Titans' side; the field position and clock situation dictated kneeling and going to overtime, with the ensuing intermission creating some space for Tennessee to cool off. Instead Jersey/A's coaches put the ball in the air, offering the Titans victory. Manning didn't make that call. The Giants were seriously outcoached -- and afterward, the coach blamed his players.

In news about a team that isn't being outcoached, the Ravens are 5-0 and scoring an average of 10 more points per game since head coach Brian Billick fired offensive coordinator Jim Fassel and

took over playcalling duties. Playcalling is more important than commonly understood. Coaches have good performances and bad performances at playcalling just as players have good games and bad games executing the plays -- and there's no doubt Billick is on a hot streak as a coach. But can playcalling make *that* much difference? TMQ wonders if Billick, many years removed from being considered an offensive mastermind, realized the Ravens' offense was about to jell under Steve McNair and fired an underling in order to ensure that he, Billick, got all the credit.

In other football news, 91,800 crazed screaming enthusiasts, including your columnist and one of his sons, attended the Notre Dame-USC contest Saturday night -- see college bonus coverage below. Attendance exceeded the 91,704 that sells out FedEx Field, the NFL's largest venue. But then, college football always has drawn the biggest crowds. Some 94,000 people attended the Stanford-Cal game in 1935, while only 33,000 attended the 1933 Bears-Giants pro football championship. (Before turnstile tickers, house figures were approximate.) The last time Michigan Stadium failed to draw at least 100,000 to a Wolverines' game was 1975. Even some high school games have in the past outdrawn the pros. The 1928 San Francisco city championship matching San Francisco Polytechnic and Lowell High was attended by at least 50,000 people, compared to the 1950 Rams-Browns NFL championship, which was attended by 29,751. What's really striking about the old numbers for college and high school attendance is that they occurred at a time of much lower population. Assume almost everyone attending the 1935 Stanford-Cal game came from California. In that year, 3.4 million people lived in the Golden State, meaning one Californian in 37 was at the game. Today 35 million people live in California, and maybe two-thirds of Saturday night's Notre Dame-USC crowd were state residents. (A rough estimate based on green in the stands and the relative ease of contemporary travel.) That suggests one Californian in 600 was in the Los Angeles Coliseum that night -- a far lower attendance share than for monster college games of the 1930s. Then again, for the next Stanford-Cal game to draw the same percentage of the California population as it did in 1935, the contest would need to be played in a stadium seating 959,000 people.

<http://sports.espn.go.com/espn/print?id=2677597&type=Page2Story&imagesPrint=off>

<http://sports.espn.go.com/espn/print?id=2677597&type=Page2Story&imagesPrint=off>

And in other football news, not only did the Giants stage an epic collapse -- they donned the mantle of the Tuesday Morning Quarterback's Single Worst Play of the Season So Far. See below.

**Stat of the Week No. 1:** Arizona had two 99-yard touchdowns -- and lost.

**Stat of the Week No. 2:** Atlanta rushed for 281 yards, committed no turnovers -- and not only lost but got *clobbered*.

**Stat of the Week No. 3:** Carolina, Jersey/B and Seattle have winning records despite being outscored.

**Stat of the Week No. 4:** LaDainian Tomlinson, a running back, has six career touchdown passes.

**Stat of the Week No. 5:** The Browns had as many turnovers and punts (nine) as first downs.

**Stat of the Week No. 6:** Arizona passed for 395 yards and rushed for 17 yards.

**Stat of the Week No. 7:** Damon Huard has 11 touchdown passes and one interception -- and has been benched.

**Stat of the Week No. 8:** In 2005, Atlanta opened 6-2, then went 2-6. This season Atlanta opened 5-2 and has since gone 0-4.

**Stat of the Week No. 9:** On "Monday Night Football," four of the first 17 pass attempts were intercepted.

**Stat of the Week No. 10:** Tony Romo has the No. 1 passer rating in the NFL.

**Cheerleader of the Week:** Bobby Schmidt of Bellevue, Wash., nominates [Ashleigh vanGerven of the New England Patriots](#), commending what he calls her "not safe for viewing at work" swimsuit calendar photo. According to her team bio, vanGerven's career goal is to work for the **Error! Hyperlink reference not valid.** in New York. Asked on her team bio, "Do you have any hidden talents?" a couple weeks ago, vanGerven honestly answered, "No." Now the team bio says on that question, "I write poetry." Obviously Ashleigh has learned that truthfulness regarding talent is not a career asset in the celebrity PR profession! Question: Why do all New England cheerleaders [tilt to the right](#)?

**Sweet Play of the Week No. 1:** Oakland leading San Diego 14-7 in the fourth quarter, LaDainian Tomlinson took the trendy "flip" play right -- Philip Rivers faked up the middle, then backhand flipped to Tomlinson running wide. There have been a lot of flip plays this autumn, including two in the Notre Dame-USC game. In fact, this play should now be designated, "Trendy flip run right, on two, break!" Because there have been a lot of flips, defenses are aware of the play. When Tomlinson took the flip, the Raiders converged on him -- then he straightened up and threw a touchdown pass to the uncovered Antonio Gates. The play was perfectly designed, as Tomlinson had only to look directly in front of him, and would throw only if no one at all was on Gates. Contrast below to a poor trick-pass design by Philadelphia.

**Sweet Play of the Week No. 2:** As Buffalo's Roscoe Parrish broke into the clear on a wild punt return, he began to stumble and seemed about to fall. Kiwaukee Thomas, running behind Parrish, reached out and grabbed him by the jersey, steadying his teammate -- then let go and Parrish, footing regained, continued for an 82-yard touchdown against Jacksonville. Should Thomas have been flagged for the rarely called "helping the runner" rule? (Rule 12, 1, 1: "No offensive player may assist the runner except by blocking opponents.") Maybe, but the play sure was sweet.

**Sour Coaching Decision of the Week No. 1:** Trailing 17-10, Chicago faced fourth-and-6 on the New England 14 with 3:38 remaining. The Bears needed a touchdown; Lovie Smith sent in the field goal unit. After the kick, *the Bears still needed a touchdown*. When you're down by seven points with a couple minutes remaining on the clock, getting a touchdown is imperative -- so try for a touchdown! Sure fourth-and-6 is risky, but you're close to the goal line, the game is almost over and *you need a touchdown*. Needless to say, Chicago never had possession in New England territory again. There are times when I want to shout, "Coach, can you see the scoreboard?" The scoreboard dictated going for it; Lovie Smith sent in the kicking team. Had the Bears gone for it and failed Smith would have been blamed for the decision, whereas this way Smith was able to blame his players. Which he did after the game, saying, "It's tough to win with four turnovers, it's as simple as that." This shifts the onus onto the players. Whatever happened to win-as-a-team, lose-as-a-team? If Bear Bryant had coached this game, afterward he would have said, "The fault was mine for not going for it at the end."

**Sour Coaching Decision of the Week No. 2:** With just more than 10 minutes remaining, the Arizona (Caution: May Contain Football-Like Substance) Cardinals scored to make it Vikings 31, Cards 19. The end-game scoreboard had come into focus, and Arizona needed a minimum of 12 more points. Take the single PAT and reduce the margin to 11! Coaching theory holds that when a deuce try is likely during a comeback, always leave the deuce attempt to the final touchdown, when your guys are pumped and the team that once held the "safe" lead is reeling. If you try for the deuce

and fail on the first of two needed touchdowns, the air goes out of your guys because they know the comeback just became less likely. Instead of closing to 31-20, Dennis Green went for two and failed. Then with a minute remaining, the Cards scored again to make it 31-25 and took the single because the deuce was meaningless here. Had Green taken a single earlier, the score would have been 31-26 and a deuce attempt pulls the Cardinals within a field goal of overtime! Arizona proceeded to recover the onside kick; the clock expired with the Cards on the Vikes' 36, from which strong kicker Neil Rackers could have tried for the tie had Green simply managed the point-after attempts according to standard coaching theory.

**Wacky Martini Watch:** Jeff Foerster of San Antonio reports that [Aldino's restaurant](#) in his city makes a wedding cake martini that smells and tastes exactly like vanilla wedding cake. Do you freeze some and drink it a year later?

**Sour Play Design of the Week:** Indianapolis leading 14-0, Philadelphia had first-and-10 on the Colts' 46. Receiver Hank Baskett got the ball on a throwback, and looked downfield to pass. Tuesday Morning Quarterback has done a number of items, apparently unread by the Eagles' coaches, showing running backs are far more likely statistically to complete trick-play passes than wide receivers -- and this week LaDainian Tomlinson threw a trick play pass for a touchdown, while Baskett's heave-ho, as perhaps you have guessed already, was intercepted. That aside, everything about the play design was wrong. First, Baskett is a rookie, and thus likely to be a bundle of nerves and make a wild throw -- which is exactly what happened. Second, Baskett seemed uncoached in the First Rule of Trick Passes: throw only if the receiver is totally uncovered, otherwise just run and we don't care if you lose yardage. Third, Baskett took the lateral in the left flat, and threw to a receiver running deep right. That's a hard completion for a quarterback, let alone a rookie wide receiver. Finally, the left-to-right play design forced Baskett to look at the entire field. One reason halfback passes are more likely to work is that the halfback is almost always running parallel to the line of scrimmage and looking only at what's directly in front of him, less than half the field. That was the design on Tomlinson's touchdown pass. Note: Following the interception, Brian Westbrook, the intended receiver, barely bothered to jog after the Colt with the ball.

**Sweet 'N' Sour Play:** Game tied at 10 in the fourth quarter, New England faced second-and-goal on the Chicago 2. In came the heavy package with Mike Vrabel as an extra blocker. "This will be a play-fake either to Vrabel or the tight end on the opposite side from him," TMQ said to his 11-year-old, Spenser. Play-fake to an uncovered tight end, touchdown. Nobody play-fakes at the goal line as well as the Patriots, and this winning touchdown looked sweet. But because nobody play-fakes at the goal line as well as the Patriots, the fact that the Bears seemed surprised was sour.

Life imitates art: The key play of the winning drive was a third-and-9 scramble by Tom Brady, on which Brady juked Brian Urlacher in the open field. After the play, Brady and Urlacher jawed. TMQ suspects Brady was yelling, "Is that all you got, Urlacher?" That's what a high school kid yells at the teenaged Urlacher after knocking him down in the long version of Nike's Briscoe High commercial.

Chicago imitates Chicago: New England stacked the line with eight and even nine defenders, daring the Bears to throw. The result was three Chicago interceptions. On Sunday the Bears looked awfully like the traditional offense-less Chicago squads.

**The Sleet Bowl:** Green Bay at Seattle opened in sleet, snow and freezing rain -- so let's pass the ball! Mike Holmgren called 23 passes and 22 runs in the first half, and the result was three Matt Hasselbeck interceptions plus an interception-like fumble plucked from the air and returned for a touchdown. It's sleeting, so why are you throwing so much? In the second half it was Green Bay's

turn to heave-ho interceptions, and Seattle pulled away to win. For the night, Seattle averaged 4.9 yards per rushing play and four yards per passing play, gaining most of its yards on the ground. Why wasn't it obvious before kickoff the night would go this way?

**Invisible Man Poses for Photographers:** "Scientists are flocking to the emerging field of astrobiology," Science magazine, the world's leading technical journal, reported recently. Wait, how can there be a professional discipline of astrobiology? No life is known to exist beyond Earth. For scientists to say they are *studying* something that has never been observed is quite an ambitious claim!

**I Took Stoll's Ethics Test and Got a Perfect Score! Of Course, I Cheated:** Are athletes less ethical than the population at large? That's the contention of Sharon Stoll, who runs the grandly named [Center for Ethical Theory and Honor in Competition](#) at the University of Idaho. Stoll has tested thousands of collegiate athletes, and found them to have deficient "moral reasoning" skills compared to college students as a whole. A sample sort of question: You score a touchdown and know that you first stepped out of bounds, but the officials didn't notice. Are you honor-bound to tell the officials? Stoll finds that athletes of the past often said they were honor-bound to tell, but today rarely say this. TMQ sort of concurs: Enforcing the rules is the officials' job, and since officiating errors are randomly distributed, if you admit an error in your favor, your opponent will not admit an error in his favor, leaving you penalized for honesty. (Actual practice: As a county league flag football coach, I once told officials that my player had stepped out of bounds, unnoticed, on a play ruled a touchdown.) Stoll further finds that athletes who try to get away with things on the field are more likely to have bad ethics when it comes to more important issues such as drug use, lawbreaking and mistreatment of women.

Stoll's studies show a noticeable decline in the ethical standards of NCAA athletes in the past decade or so, plus a rise in the sense of entitlement, especially athletes feeling they are above the law. She finds that athletes in NCAA "revenue producing" sports -- football, men's basketball and ice hockey -- are more likely to have weak ethics than athletes in sports-for-its-own-sake events. Stoll finds athletes in individual sports such as tennis are more likely to be ethical than athletes in team sports. And though female athletes score better than males in tests of morality, Stoll finds that scores for women in sports are dropping so fast they might converge with scores for men. This conforms to the race-to-the-bottom theory of gender equality: As the sexes equalize, rather than men becoming more fair and kind like women, women become more aggressive and cold-blooded like men. [Here is a summary of some of Stoll's recent findings.](#)

**TMQ Tab-Worthy:** Many readers have written asking there be some pathway to Tuesday Morning Quarterback that is always in the same place in the ESPN.com kingdom. From now on there will be. When the column posts Tuesday at noonish Eastern, there will be a TMQ tab in the Spotlight area just below the lead story on the ESPN.com home page. TMQ is also frequently the [Page 2](#) lead story on Tuesdays, and always somewhere on the top half of Page 2 Tuesdays and Wednesdays. You can also find Tuesday Morning Quarterback by mousing over the Page 2 tab near the top of every page of ESPN.com; this opens a list of Page 2 writers, and you click on my name. (And columns can be found on [my archive page](#) shortly after being published.) Anyway, TMQ having its own tab on the ESPN home page is pretty cool. From now on look there Tuesdays and Wednesdays if you have any trouble locating the column.

**Best Purist Drive:** Trailing the Squared Sevens 17-13 with 3:54 remaining, St. Louis took possession on its 20 and, immediately, Marc Bulger was sacked. Game over? Two snaps later it's fourth-and-1 and Les Mouflons do not go pass-wacky, sending Stephen Jackson off-tackle for the first down. Six snaps later it's fourth-and-1 on the San Francisco 13 and Les Mouflons do not go

pass-wacky, sending Stephen Jackson off-tackle for the first down. Winning touchdown on the next snap, and the football gods smiled.

**Oakland Raiders Score "Placebo Touchdowns":** The placebo effect is well documented in medical studies, which often conclude that those taking placebos do as well as those assigned costly drugs or therapies. Recently a study by Jennifer Otto of the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse found the placebo effect also applies to sports drinks. Otto tested two groups of 5K runners, one given a bottle of tap water to drink before running, the other given a bottle of "super-oxygenated sports water." The group receiving the "super-oxygenated sports water" ran the course an average of 83 seconds faster. Except the whole test was a ruse -- the "super-oxygenated sports water" was also plain tap water, that is to say, a placebo. Believing they had swallowed something technologically advanced caused the placebo group to perform better. [Jennifer Otto's study](#) was sponsored by the American Council on Exercise, whose calling is to teach proven methods of safe exercise while opposing fads. ACE says it "protects all segments of society against ineffective fitness products, programs and trends. An ACE-certified trainer or aerobics instructor must know CPR, the fundamentals of orthopedics and understand such issues as blood lipid levels.

"Super-oxygenated" water actually exists, sold under brand names such as [Aqua Rush](#). There is no medical evidence the stuff acts any differently in the body than regular water. ACE studies have found that heart rate, blood pressure and other measurables are the same during exercise with regular water as with "super-oxygenated" water. Advanced Hydration Technology, the company that markets Aqua Rush, sells it for about \$11 a gallon, about four times the price of gasoline. When you think about it, the ACE studies suggest that the ideal situation is for an athlete or someone who is exercising to drink plain tap water, but believe he or she is drinking "super-oxygenated" water.



What the world needs now is a really expensive prescription placebo.

Tuesday Morning Quarterback has long been on the placebo case. In 2004, I noted studies showing that placebos are efficacious and said it was unfair that only those who participate in clinical trials enjoy the benefits of placebos. I asked, "If sugar pills actually work, why aren't placebos a standard treatment given by doctors and hospitals? The answer is that placebos aren't expensive enough!" At the risk of quoting myself, let me quote what followed: "Therefore I plan to make my fortune by marketing the incredible new drug Placebon™. A patented, proprietary formula consisting entirely of sugar, Placebon™ will revolutionize medicine. Elaborately packaged in individual foil doses, Placebon™ will be obtained only with a doctor's prescription. Placebon™ will be the subject of a multimillion-dollar marketing campaign consisting of costly television advertising and full-page magazine ads with hundreds of words in disclaimers. In the TV ads, smiling multicultural people will run through fields of wild flowers laughing and embracing, but the announcer will never give the slightest hint what the drug is for."

Here was the rest of my plan: "Placebon™ will be extremely expensive, thus increasing demand. Pharmaceutical companies will treat doctors to lavish dinners, send them on all-expense-paid cruises and hand out handsome 'consulting' fees to get them to prescribe Placebon™. Controlled clinical studies will fail to show that Placebon™ is any more effective than breathing, but the manufacturer will lobby the Food and Drug Administration not to report this. Celebrities will be hired to have public breakdowns, then make spectacular recoveries by taking Placebon™. A

saccharine version, Diet Placebon™, will be marketed. Initially, many insurers will refuse to pay for Placebon™. But as senior citizens stream across the Canadian border to buy low-cost government-subsidized Placebon™, politicians will demand that insurers pay, and the health care share of the GDP will rise again. Eventually a generic will be available at discount, while the patent holder makes a tiny molecular change in order to maintain proprietary pricing of advanced Placebon 24", a longer-lasting version. By converting the placebo from cheap to extremely expensive, Placebon™ will expand the benefits of the placebo effect from a tiny few who participate in clinical trials to millions of Americans."

*Warning: Do not take Placebon™ if you are pregnant or not pregnant. Product not suitable for anyone who is tall or short or not tall or not short. Side effects may include pneumonia, cancer, bubonic plague and amputation. If you had trouble getting dates in high school, Placebon™ may not be right for you. Do not operate tunnel-boring machinery or artillery after taking Placebon™. Never take Placebon™ or any prescription drug without first paying a large sum to a doctor.*

**Jax, Giants -- Are Either for Real? (Part Two):** Last week's column asked whether either Jacksonville or Jersey/A was for real; as Jax lost to the Bills and the G-Persons collapsed in the fourth quarter at Tennessee, this question becomes more pertinent. In its past six games, Jacksonville has lost twice to Houston and once to Buffalo, which makes it difficult to take the Jags seriously. Jacksonville boasts of great defense, but couldn't stop a last-second victory drive by the low-voltage Buffalo offense.

Tuesday Morning Quarterback has often noted lack of boldness in coaching decisions by Jack of the River, especially kicking decisions in opposition territory, and this was a factor again Sunday. Trailing 24-14 on the first snap of the fourth quarter, Jacksonville faced fourth-and-1 on the Bills' 9. TMQ's immutable law, Kick Early Go For It Late, dictates go for it -- because now it's late and the endgame scoreboard has come into focus. Plus, on the day Jacksonville rushed for 207 yards and a 5.9 yards-per-rush average against Buffalo's suspect run defense. Run the ball! Instead Jack of the River sent in the field goal unit, and went on to lose the contest by three points. Another timid Del Rio call: After scoring to tie the contest with 28 seconds remaining, he had the Jags squib-kick, resulting in Buffalo getting the ball on its 40. But the Bills held all three timeouts! Twenty-eight seconds can be enough to score if you have good field position and three timeouts. Note Buffalo's last-gasp-to-avoid-overtime situation was much more promising than the Giants', as the Bills had better field position and home-crowd energy.

**So Long, Steelers:** Maybe it was always folly to think Ben Roethlisberger, coming off a motorcycle accident and then removal of his appendix, should be playing this season. The quarterback with the formerly charmed life now has 19 interceptions on the season and a 3-7 starting record. But, ye gods, everyone on the Steelers' offense played poorly at Baltimore. The Ravens blitzed a lot, and this normally risky tactic worked in part because Pittsburgh running backs seemed to make no attempt to blitz-block on key downs. The Steelers' offensive line, normally solid, blocked poorly even on standard-defense downs when there were more blockers than pass rushers. On the game's decisive play, Baltimore led 17-0 and Pittsburgh faced third-and-5 on the Nevermores' 30: sack, fumble returned for a touchdown and TMQ wrote the words "season over" in his notebook regarding Pittsburgh. On this play Steelers' left tackle Marvel Smith just stands there, making no attempt to hit anybody, as Corey Ivy blows through Smith's gap for the forced fumble that concludes the defending champion's season. Because the Pittsburgh offensive line usually has played with heart, Sunday's sack fest was some combination aberration and great Baltimore performance. But *ay caramba*, was the Pittsburgh blocking bad. Roethlisberger can't block for himself.

**This Fulfills My Obligation to Say Something About the Cincinnati-Cleveland Game:**

Cincinnati leading Cleveland 30-0 with 10 minutes remaining, what was Carson Palmer doing still in the game and still heaving passes? Was Marvin Lewis trying to run up the score? The football gods always punish that. Or was he intent on getting the team's first shutout in nearly two decades? Shutouts are irrelevant; risking injury to stars is quite relevant. Put Lewis down for a questionable coaching day, too.

**This Fulfills My Obligations to Say Something About Numerous Games:** The Thanksgiving Day contests already seem far in the past. And I watched tape of the Houston-Jersey/B game. Many people ran around chasing a ball. Coaches were always angry no matter what the officials called. I'm sure the whole event was very interesting to immediate family members. Otherwise I can't think of anything to say about that game and I bet you can't either.

Also, though TMQ promises at least one comment about each NFL game, I make no warranty express or implied regarding the NFL Network's new Thursday night contests -- most will seem far in the past by the following Tuesday. And only now are commentators noting that the NFL's broadcast power play did not succeed. The league scheduled NFLN's first live telecast on Thanksgiving night, in hopes of forcing Comcast and Time Warner to say uncle and put the new network on basic cable at NFLN's asking price. But in the days before Thanksgiving, callers did not deluge their cable carriers with complaints about not getting NFLN, as the league had hoped, and Comcast and Time Warner stood firm in their contention that the price of the new network is too high. Hearts must have sunk in NFLN offices when Denver-Kansas City, the first telecast, was a dull game; had it been a thriller, football fans who didn't see it would have complained the following day. Anyway the power play failed, and presumably NFLN now will cut its asking price to the market level. It's good to know the National Football League can't get its way in everything! Optics note: the NFL Network ran full-page ads in major newspapers, asserting its broadcast was "a huge success." The ads show announcers Bryant Gumbel and Cris Collinsworth seeming to stand in a stadium tunnel. They've been super imposed into the picture, with lighted faces despite standing in shadow. Look closely -- Collinsworth is significantly disproportionate to the background.

**Plus, "Vanderjagt" Sounds Like a Flavored Schnapps:** Speaking of coaches blaming players, last season Bill "Mr. Personality" Parcells blamed his kickers for the Cowboys failing to make the playoffs. Dallas spent a lot of money on kicker Mike Vanderjagt, and now he's been cut for missing a game-winning kick. Where, exactly, is the coach who has a kicker who never misses at the end? "Win as a team, lose as a team." In individualistic sports such as basketball and baseball, individuals can play well or poorly regardless of the overall effort. But in football, when you win it's because everyone played and coached well, and when you lose it's because everyone played and coached poorly. To shift the blame for an entire game to the kicker over one single play is unsportsmanlike and petty. Thus, fitting behavior for the NFL coach!

**Stop Me Before I Blitz Again!** Carolina led 13-10 and had the Redskins, quarterbacked by Jason Campbell in his second career start, facing third-and-8 on their 34 with about four minutes remaining. Since the average NFL play gains about 5 yards, all the Cats had to do was play straight defense and the odds favored a stop. Instead, it's a blitz! The result was a 66-yard, game-winning pass to Chris Cooley.

**A Chance to Make Your Fortune: Start a Valet Parking Service for Jet Aircraft** Tuesday Morning Quarterback has been chortling that the profusion of privately owned jets, and of fractional-share private jet ownership, is causing airfields at chic destinations to become so crowded the rich can't get in. Airfields near Aspen, Colo., Jackson Hole, Wyo., Nantucket, Mass., and Sea Island, Ga., are now unable to accommodate all private-jet traffic during holidays. The problem isn't

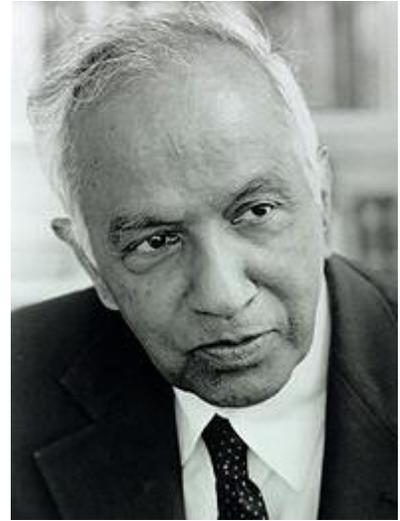
the fields' ability to handle takeoffs and landings, rather the lack of room for private jets to park while their passengers frolic. That's right -- you make millions, you buy the private Gulfstream, you fly to Sun Valley for Christmas in elite luxury and discover that you can't find a parking place! Recently, the Federal Aviation Administration projected that the advent of relatively affordable small private jets such as the [Adam 700](#) soon will cause many more airfields to become overbooked. Today, for example, McCarran International at Las Vegas is close to capacity at 1,600 flights per day. By 2014, the FAA projects, another 400 private jets daily will be asking to land at McCarran.

A couple summers ago TMQ was in Aspen, talking at the [Aspen Institute](#), a sort of Davos for people who aren't invited to the actual Davos. Bicycling past Aspen airport, I saw Chainsaw Dan Snyder's private jet parked there: The plane has the Heap Big Injun symbol of the Redskins on its tail. I thought: Man, Snyder must have some serious clout to get a parking space for a private jet at Aspen in August. In some ways the parking space is more difficult to obtain than the jet.

**News from Distant Space:** Previous TMQs have noted that as telescopes improve, astronomers find supernovae are more common and more destructive than assumed -- and this is not necessarily the best possible news. The latest discovery, from a team lead by University of Toronto researcher Andy Howell, is that the "Chandrasekhar limit" on supernova explosions isn't a limit.

Subramanyan Chandrasekhar, one of the leading 20th-century astronomers, won a Nobel Prize for his 1930s studies that maintained the most common category of exploding stars, called the Type Ia supernova, could not exceed about 1.4 times the mass of our sun; this seemed to impose an upper boundary on the amount of destruction such a supernova explosion could cause. But the Toronto researchers observed a Type Ia supernova, dubbed SNLS-03D3bb, that reached about two solar masses before detonating, and thus released far more radiation than was thought possible. There's another implication. Partly owing to Chandrasekhar's arguments, it was assumed all Type Ia supernovae explode with about the same luminosity, meaning their light level could be used to estimate the expanse between the Milky Way and distant galaxies. (If they're all giving off approximately the same amount of light, relative measurements allow you to estimate how far away they are.) Current estimates of the size and age of the universe, and its rate of expansion, rely on the assumption that Type Ia supernovae obey the Chandrasekhar limit. If it turns out this class of exploding stars varies significantly, all bets might be off about how large and old the universe is, or its rate of expansion.

Now consider this. Since Edwin Hubble's discovery in 1929 that the universe was not static but expanding, theorists have debated whether the expansion would continue forever, gradually slow down or eventually reverse as gravity overcame the outward momentum of the Big Bang and pulled the stuff of the firmament back to its starting point. (The latter conjecture is called the Big Crunch.) Researchers using Type Ia supernova as measuring sticks declared in 1998 that cosmic expansion was accelerating, which nobody's theory predicted. The galaxies could not be speeding up unless energy were somehow being added to them, which caused cosmologists to speculate that mysterious "dark energy" permeates the universe and functions as the mirror image of gravity. No physicist has offered even the vaguest explanation of where dark energy originates or what powers it. (General relativity theory does offer an explanation of how gravity derives its power to pull.) Yet even though the dark energy concept requires you to believe that most of the energy of the universe is undetectable and so far inexplicable, physicists rapidly have accepted the idea that dark energy exists and even might be the dominant force of the cosmos. What if it turns out the universe is not accelerating, that the apparent rising rate of expansion is a data error caused by the false assumption that all Type Ia supernovas have a standard brightness? Then physicists will have to announce that dark energy never existed in the first place. But trust us, we're experts!



He thought there was a limit to the destructive power of nature. Umm, looks like he thought wrong.

**Adventures in Officiating:** Arizona sports-talk radio went nuts when booth officials did not review a sideline throw to Larry Fitzgerald that could have put the Cards into field-goal position with 18 seconds remaining. Fitzgerald appeared forced out as he made the catch; if I'd been the zebra on the scene, I would have closed my fists and signaled completion. The trouble is, force-out is a judgment call that can't be reviewed. Section 9 of the NFL Official Playing Rules, which governs replay challenges and booth reviews, specifically exempts the force-out call.

Meanwhile everyone's seen the Chargers' Vincent Jackson spike on a key fourth down in the San Diego-Oakland game. First it was ruled a lost fumble belonging to Oakland, then ruled an illegal forward pass but Oakland ball because San Diego had failed to make the first down, then ruled San Diego ball minus 5 yards for illegal forward pass because Jackson did gain first-down yardage. The CBS announcers went ballistic, Randy Cross declaring, "Art Shell is going to get a formal apology from the league office about this call." And no matter how you slice it, referee Mike Carey looked indecisive. But the forward-pass ruling wasn't flat-out wrong as the sports-yak world has been saying. Many fans and sportscasters falsely believe that whether a flying football is a forward pass depends on whether it is delivered overhand. Actually this is irrelevant. Any kind of arm motion that causes the ball to fly forward is a forward pass (either legal if behind the line or illegal if across) and any arm motion that causes the ball to move parallel to or away from the line of scrimmage is a backward pass, commonly known as a lateral. Forward passes are dead balls and backward passes are live balls. Meanwhile, according to Rule 3-2-4, "If a player pretends to fumble and causes the ball to go forward, it is a forward pass and may be illegal"; and according to Rule 8-4-2, "If a player intentionally fumbles forward, it is a forward pass." These rules could seem to say Carey was correct. But was Vincent Jackson either intentionally fumbling or pretending to fumble? No way! If he thought he had just intentionally fumbled or pretended to fumble, Jackson would not have strolled back toward the huddle. Now check the definition of a forward pass, which at Rule 3-

21-2 seems to say that a player must intend to pass to another player for the action to be a forward pass. Clearly Jackson did not intend to pass to another player. So none of these rules, all of which invoke intent, seem to apply to what happened. What Jackson *intended* to do was taunt -- "the use of baiting or taunting acts or words that engender ill will between teams" -- and his action should have cost San Diego 15 yards, not 5. TMQ suggests that if Carey had called taunting, there would have been no controversy. At the least a rules clarification is needed, since the rules cited by the league in supporting the decision have to do with the rare intentional fumble, and that's not what happened here.

**Jim Mora Decried as "Quarterback Killer":** Two weeks ago TMQ noted that Atlanta coach Mora the Younger made a puzzling decision at the end of the first half against Cleveland, ordering an onside kick with nine seconds remaining and the Falcons holding but one timeout. The Browns recovered in position for a Hail Mary, but suppose Atlanta had recovered -- what would have been accomplished? Atlanta went on to lose. Now it's Sunday and the reeling Falcons are at home against the United States Saints. The Saints lead 14-6 and hold the ball at midfield with seven seconds remaining in the first half. The clock is stopped owing to an incompleteness, but Mora calls timeout, allowing New Orleans extra time to set up a Hail Mary play. Touchdown, and suddenly the Falcons are in deep trouble with the score 21-6 at the half. Note: I don't wish to alarm you, but New Orleans now has the NFL's No. 1 passing attack.

As the Falcons have dropped four straight, everyone's focusing on criticizing Michael Vick. What about all the odd coaching decisions made by Mora and his assistants? Vick wasn't the one who ordered himself to take seven-step drops on passes against New Orleans -- something he's never been good at, and which plays away from his strength, the sprint-out pass. (Sprint-outs keep Vick closer to the line and also simplify the field, requiring him to look at only half the coverage, not the entire coverage as in a deep dropback.) Trailing 14-3, Atlanta had third-and-goal on the Saints' 2, on a day the Falcons would rush for 281 yards and average 6.2 yards per rush. Just run the ball! It wasn't Vick who not only called a passing play but a *seven-step drop* play that required him to run backward to the New Orleans 10; sack, and Atlanta settles for a field goal. You're on the 2, why are you instructing your quarterback to run backward to the 10? Last season's incident in which Mora the Younger did not know that a tie would keep Atlanta alive for the playoffs, and was screaming into a cell phone on the sidelines as he sent in the wrong decisions knocking the Falcons out of the postseason, is hardly the only weird coaching by Mora. Plus, a good coach focuses the criticism on himself, away from his players, a la Bear Bryant. Time to look away from Vick and toward the Atlanta sideline.

**Best Blocks:** Jamar Nesbit of New Orleans trap-pulled and flattened the Falcon at the point of attack as Deuce McAllister strolled in for an untouched touchdown. You've never heard the name Jamar Nesbit, but this guard is having a fine season.

**News from Nearby Space:** Meanwhile the more researchers learn about asteroid and comet strikes on Earth, these events seem much more common than previously assumed -- which is definitely not good news. Last summer, TMQ laid out the disturbing evidence that space-rock strikes powerful enough to cause mass extinctions were not confined to the primordial mists: Something gigantic smashed into the Earth about 10,000 years ago, and there might have been a severe comet or meteorite strike [as recently as the year 535](#). Recently researcher Dallas Abbott of the Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory at Columbia University [has found indications](#) that a huge comet or asteroid fell into the Indian Ocean about 4,800 years ago, causing global tsunamis.

Abbott's work is especially important because she is studying the oceans, not land. Most of what's known about past space-object strikes comes from the study of land craters. But three-quarters of

Earth's surface is water; Abbott reasoned that three-quarters of space objects must crash into the seas. Her work suggests a lot of comets and large rocks have hit the seas, many recently in geologic terms. As recently as a decade ago, most scientists assumed that space-rock strikes powerful enough to cause general devastation happen only every million years or so. Now it looks like they are far more frequent. If a rock comparable to the one that struck the Indian Ocean 4,800 years ago struck today in Kansas, half the population of the United States might die. And as TMQ endlessly points out, what is NASA doing about this? *Absolutely nothing.*

NASA continues to waste about 10 billion of your tax dollars annually on a space station project that had no scientific value, existing solely to justify money for aerospace contractors and staff budgets at NASA manned-flight centers. NASA plans to waste 200-500 billion of your tax dollars on return-to-the-Moon missions that don't even have a theoretical justification -- the sole purpose of return-to-the-Moon is money for NASA insiders. Yet if a comet or large meteor was spotted heading toward our world, NASA could do nothing. And NASA isn't even researching possible anti-space-rock technology. No agency of your government wastes taxpayers' money more cynically or systematically than the National Aeronautics and Space Agency. If a big space object strikes the Earth, sending humanity's survivors back into the Dark Ages, our descendents will consider the present Washington government history's worst collections of fools for doing nothing while there was time.

**Leftover Point From the Giants' Epic Collapse:** Leading 21-0 on the first snap of the fourth quarter, Jersey/A faced fourth-and-3 on the Flaming Thumbtacks' 31. A field goal here ices the contest, but Giants' coaches have no confidence in the weak-legged Jay Feely; they go for it, pass incomplete. At the end game, it's tied and Tennessee moves to the Giants' 31 with 11 ticks remaining. Rob Bironas kicks true from the exact yard line Tom Coughlin would not allow Jay Feely to kick from. Wind was light. If you don't have someone on the roster who can make a 48-yard field goal, you are not an NFL contender.

**Single Worst Play of the Season So Far:** You've got to run some mighty bad plays to blow a 21-0 fourth-quarter lead. It's tempting to say the worst occurred with 10:51 remaining. The Giants led 21-0, Vince Young had just scrambled on fourth-and-9 and been stopped short of the first down; Jersey ball, and TMQ would have written the words "game over" in his notebook. Except as Young went out of bounds, Giants defensive back Frank Walker delivered a brainless late hit. First down Tennessee, and the Titans scored three snaps later. Walker is a nobody, yet thought his own desire to make the highlight reel by popping a star quarterback was more important than the team.

A worse play was to come, though, because it involved more than one Giant. Now it's Jersey 21, Tennessee 14, and the Flaming Thumbtacks face fourth-and-10 with 2:44 remaining -- another chance for the Giants to end the comeback. Young scrambles for the first down, and the vaunted Giants defense is on its way to surrendering 24 points in the final quarter. On the scramble, Mathias Kiwanuka deliberately let Young go, believing he had thrown the ball and not wanting a roughing-the-passer flag. This was just a mistake by Kiwanuka. It's what happened next that was bad: Defenders Will Demps, William Joseph, Kiwanuka and Fred Robbins all stood there doing nothing, making no attempt to chase Young as he headed for the first down. Will Demps, William Joseph, Mathias Kiwanuka and Fred Robbins -- you staged the Single Worst Play of the Season So Far. Stupid late hits, guys standing around doing nothing -- sounds like a team that's been outcoached, doesn't it?

**USC-Notre Dame Analysis:** The main thing that happened was the Trojans showed they are the better team. Better lines both ways, better linebackers, better running backs and at least equal quarterbacks. The Irish had four dropped passes, including a killer drop on fourth down while the

game was close; Southern Cal suffered only one drop. Keeping the theme of the column, Charlie Weis was outcoached. Nearly all of USC's passing yardage came down the middle; Notre Dame opened the game with its safeties unusually wide, inviting passes down the middle, yet never adjusted as the Trojans kept throwing exactly where you'd expect them to. Reaching first-and-goal in the first half, Weis called three consecutive passes, and the result was incompleteness, incompleteness, incompleteness, field goal. Facing fourth-and-1 with a 14-3 lead, Pete Carroll called the trendy flip run -- John David Booty faked a quarterback sneak and then backhand flipped to the tailback, first down, and the Trojans scored on the possession to make it 21-3. Later in the first half -- USC 21, Notre Dame 10 -- the Irish faced third-and-1 in USC territory. Weis called the flip, too. But USC had just used that play, how was Weis expecting to trick the hosts with a play that was fresh in their minds? Loss of yardage, and Notre Dame failed on fourth-and-3.

USC note: I've now seen the fabled Song Girls in person, and can report that while they are every bit as gorgeous as advertised, they didn't seem to have much in the way of dance or cheer routines. During the game the Song Girls mostly dipped at the knees and waved two fingers in the USC salute. "Unlike other college cheer teams, the Song Girls are primarily a dance squad. The Song Girls hold themselves to a higher standard than that of many squads. They constantly work to insure their choreography is innovative and exciting," [USC claims](#). Innovative choreography? Their performance was nothing close to the complex hip-hop done by the Washington, Philadelphia and Tampa NFL cheerleaders, among other squads; little different from the sort of abbreviated, simple kick steps good high school cheerleading units use. The Song Girls are just college kids and are, one hopes, cheering on the side while spending most of their time studying. But why claim mythic status for the Song Girls if all they do is jump around and wave?

Los Angeles note: Grant and I stayed at a downtown hotel, and met an old friend of mine at [Philippe's](#), a local landmark sandwich restaurant that seems not to have changed one whit since opening in 1908. I used MapQuest for directions. The restaurant was about two miles from the hotel, and except for the initial and final turns, the directions consisted *entirely* of freeway ramps.

**Obscure College Score of the Week No. 1:** Appalachian State 45, Coastal Carolina 21. (Division I-AA playoffs.) Located in Conway, N.C., Coastal Carolina says [its current president](#) has "successfully engaged the university's chief stakeholders," which sounds like a military maneuver.

**Obscure College Score of the Week No. 2:** Shepherd 31, Merrimack 7 (Division II playoffs). Located in Shepherdstown, W.Va., Shepherd University's dining hall is playing host to a Victorian Christmas dinner. [Menu items](#) include figgy pudding and pasta with tofu, the second of which doesn't sound terribly Victorian. Date of the Victorian Christmas dinner? Dec. 1.

**Obscure College Score of the Week No. 3:** Saint John's of Minnesota 21, Whitworth 3. Located in Spokane, Wash., Whitworth College has a [35-person student government](#) for a student body of 2,156, meaning one student in 62 belongs to the government. How platonic!

**In Alabama's Case, the Orangutans Are Running the Athletic Director's Office:** After years of troubles, Alabama had a great season in 2005 under Mike Shula, winning the Cotton Bowl -- and now has fired him because 2006 wasn't a great season too. Shula's Tide finished 6-6 this fall, and as TMQ has pointed out before, football-factory schools have such huge advantages in recruiting and rigged schedules that it is assumed an orangutan could win six games coaching Alabama, Ohio State and so on. Normally a football-factory coach's added value is the number of games above six that he wins. In Alabama's case, considering the school's football program has suffered fiasco after fiasco, Shula's added value should have been seen as bringing character and stability. But character

doesn't matter at Alabama, we want to beat Auburn! What self-respecting coach would take the job at this screwed-up school?

**Reader Animadversion:** Got a complaint or a deeply held grievance? Write me at [TMQ\\_ESPN@yahoo.com](mailto:TMQ_ESPN@yahoo.com). Include your real name and the name of your hometown, and I may quote you by name unless you instruct me otherwise. Note: Giving your hometown improves your odds of being quoted. Note: There won't be a Reader Animadversion this Wednesday, but the feature will resume next Wednesday.

**Mini Reader Animadversion:** Since there won't be a Reader Animadversion this week, let me toss in one reader comment. A month ago, TMQ suggested NBC could save "Friday Night Lights" by marketing it to women as a show about relationships under the strain of modern life. *Scott Remley of Washington, D.C.*, writes, "Did you catch the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade on Thursday on NBC? As is tradition, the network used stand-up interviews to push its programming, with largely scripted questions and answers. The first interview pushed 'Friday Night Lights.' What was interesting was the demographic they were clearly targeting, as the interviewed actor was not one of the players or cheerleaders or coaches but Connie Britton, who plays Tami Taylor, the coach's wife. The first question to Britton was an open-ended tell-us-about-the-show. Britton talked about the show being a family drama, not just a football series. She talked about the relationships of the characters. When she was asked a follow-up question in the vein of, 'Do you need to understand football to watch Friday Night Lights,' her response was, 'Absolutely not.' Britton said she frequently has to ask the show's director for instructions on how to react to the football scenes, because she has limited football knowledge. I work in politics, so I have a pretty good understanding of what was going on here: NBC was trying to shore up female viewers for FNL. When you have a male candidate with problems with female voters, a common first move is to put lots of shots of his wife into the ads. Hence NBC's choice of middle-aged Connie Britton over any of the young or athletic characters -- an attempt to target 25-to-45 female viewers. Clearly, the NBC research and programming execs are reading TMQ."

**Next Week:** Tom Coughlin blames the Trilateral Commission.

**Monday, December 4, 2006**

**Updated: December 5, 4:20 PM ET**

Coaches, please stop and think!

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By Gregg Easterbrook

Perennially, Tuesday Morning Quarterback stares in disbelief as teams punt when trailing late. But there's a worse sequence of events -- when an NFL coach punts with the game still in reach, *then* goes for it with only minutes remaining and all hope lost. Sunday, Washington trailed Atlanta 24-10 with 10 minutes remaining, and the Redskins faced fourth-and-2 at midfield. Joe Gibbs sent in the punting unit. You need two scores and there are 10 minutes left! More than two-thirds of fourth-and-2 plays succeed! You're at midfield! Boom goes the punt. Then, still trailing 24-10 with four minutes remaining, Redskins deep in their territory, Washington faced fourth-and-4. At this point it made no difference whether the Redskins punted, went for it or started square dancing. And then -- at the point it no longer mattered -- Gibbs went for the first down.

Isolated instance? In Atlanta-New Orleans on "Monday Night Football" back on Sept. 25, the Falcons trailed by 20 points early in the fourth quarter and faced fourth-and-7: Jim Mora ordered a punt. After the clock had ticked down to six minutes and Atlanta still trailed by 20, but now faced fourth-and-12, *then* Mora decided to go for it. When there was still hope, however slim, of staging a comeback, Mora punted. When all hope was extinguished, Mora went for it. Oakland versus Seattle on "Monday Night Football" on Nov. 6, Oakland trailed by 13 points in the third quarter and punted on fourth-and-1 from midfield; then with nine minutes remaining, still down by 13 and facing fourth-and-5, *then* the Raiders went for it. Trailing the Giants 16-3 with seven minutes remaining Oct. 8, Gibbs ordered the Redskins to punt; at the two-minute warning, with all hope lost, *then* he went for it. Onside kicks follow a similar pattern. In the USC-Notre Dame game, the Irish scored to pull within 31-17 with 10 minutes to go, and still held some hope; Charlie Weis had his charges kick away. When it was 37-24 with three minutes remaining, then Weis ordered an onside kick.

Here are the possible reasons that NFL and big-college coaches punt on fourth-and-short when there's still time for a comeback, then go for it on fourth-and-long when there's no hope whatsoever:

- "But that's what we always do!"
- "That's what Jimmy Conzelman and Ray Flaherty did!" (Note: Coaches of the 1930s.)
- "I want the players to be the ones who get blamed for losing the game."

Over and over again it is impressed upon TMQ that for all the billions of dollars invested in the NFL and big-college NCAA football, for all the dozens of assistant coaches per team and thousands of hours spent dissecting game film, it is amazing how little coaches seem to think about what they are doing. Punting on fourth-and-short when trailing late makes no sense, unless you aren't thinking about what you are doing. Or unless your true concern is blame-shifting. If the coach goes for it and the attempt fails, the next day the sports-yak world blames the coach; if the coach sends in the punt unit and the defense doesn't get the ball back, sports radio blames the defense. This attitude is aided by the fact that sportscasters, in my experience, never point out how ridiculous it is to punt on fourth-and-short when trailing late -- probably because most sportscasters never really think about the game, either. Trailing Philadelphia 27-3 at the end of the third quarter on Nov. 12, the Redskins faced fourth-and-5 at midfield. "That will force Washington to punt," announcer Dick Stockton

intoned. No team is "forced" to punt. But NFL coaches like it when sportscasters assume this, as it shifts the criticism off the coaches. And boom went the punt.

In other news, in Sunday's loss to the Jets, the Packers dropped back for 49 passing plays, for an average gain of 4.1 yards per play and three turnovers. On the other hand, they had 23 rushing plays, for an average gain of 6.5 yards and no turnovers. The result was an embarrassing Green Bay defeat at Lambeau Field. Regardless of whether the run is working, Green Bay's coaches are calling Favre's number over and over again in hopes of getting him the record for career touchdown passes.

In more news, trailing 20-0, ball on the Pittsburgh 9 on the game's last down, Jon "Once I Was a Teenaged Coach" Gruden sent in the City of Tampa field goal unit to make the final 20-3.

Obviously the Bucs were toast no matter what they did on that play. But there is the little matter of being able to look at yourself in the mirror, and for that, Tampa needed to spend its last play trying a touchdown. Gruden didn't want a shutout on his record; shutouts look bad when management sits you down for your season-ending review. But Gruden's first responsibility is to the team, not his résumé. As a player I'd rather lose 20-0 but go down swinging than humiliate myself with a meaningless field goal on the last snap.

And in college news, the sports-yak world is agonizing over whether Michigan or Florida "deserved" to meet Ohio State in college football's final game. Either choice would be arbitrary -- without a playoff format, it's impossible to know who "deserves" to play the Buckeyes. Bear in mind, the BCS formula was never intended to ensure a clear, on-the-field champion. It was intended to maximize television exposure for the big conferences. Note that the formal name of the Ohio State-Florida event does not involve the phrase "national championship." Rather, what will happen on Jan. 8 is the BCS Championship Game. Get it? The winner becomes champion of the BCS -- a system devised to maximize the income of BCS founding schools -- not champion of college football. TMQ thinks the event's formal name should be College Football's Final Game of Another Controversial Season.

Why did USC honk its chance to play in College Football's Final Game of Another Controversial Season? Blame the Song Girls! See below.

**Stat of the Week No. 1:** In the past two weeks, Tennessee has trailed by a combined 35-0, then outscored opponents by a combined 44-3.

**Stat of the Week No. 2:** Chicago had twice as many return yards (222) as offensive yards (111).

**Stat of the Week No. 3:** Seattle is 8-4 and has been outscored by opponents this season.

**Stat of the Week No. 4:** Terrell Owens leads the league in dropped passes.

**Stat of the Week No. 5:** Tom Brady is 21-1 on artificial turf -- and artificial turf was just installed at Gillette Field.

**Stat of the Week No. 6:** After allowing 65 points in Weeks 10 and 11, the Bengals allowed seven points in Weeks 12 and 13.

**Stat of the Week No. 7:** Denver has played six games after dark and six in daylight.

**Stat of the Week No. 8:** Houston had more return yards (213) than offensive yards (124).

**Stat of the Week No. 9:** Detroit, at 2-10, has outscored Denver, at 7-5, this season.

**Stat of the Week No. 10:** The 13 punts in the first half of Eagles-Panthers game Monday night were a record for a half.

**Cheerleader of the Week:** Reader Caesar Montevecchio of Erie, Pa., nominates [Tiffany of the Redskins](#), a graduate of Georgetown University, one of the hardest colleges in the United States from which to receive a thick letter (signaling admission). Montevecchio reports, "Tiffany was the captain of the Georgetown cheerleading squad, and I was a male member of that team. She is really bright and really friendly." According to Tiffany's team bio, "I've enjoyed defying the stereotypes that exist about cheerleaders." Also according to her bio, at Georgetown, Tiffany was enrolled in the [Walsh School of Foreign Service](#), a prestigious school-within-a-school for aspiring diplomats. Maybe Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice should travel with Tiffany as her personal pep squad -- Rice could use one. Here are diplomatic cheers:



We promise not to make any foreign affairs jokes about Tiffany's Georgetown degree in diplomatic studies.

*Frank and useful! Frank and useful! We felt the exchange was frank and useful!*

*Our hands are high our feet are low, and from our country your ambassador must go.*

*AIR strike, AIR strike.*

**Sweet Play of the Week No. 1:** Redskins leading 14-10 in yet another desultory effort by the Falcons, Atlanta had the ball on the Nanticokes' 22, and Mora the Younger radioed in some dumb play -- probably a 14-step drop that required Michael Vick to sprint backward to midfield. Vick defied his coach and in the huddle drew up a post pattern to Michael Jenkins: touchdown. Afterward Vick said, "Sometimes you have to overcome coaching." Bravo! Mora isn't stuck with a coach-killer quarterback, Vick is stuck with a quarterback-killer coach. Here is a suggestion to put Atlanta into the playoffs: Switch off the helmet radio and let Vick call his own plays. Have Mora spend all his time talking to his dad on a cell phone on the sideline. Vick is a gifted player, Mora is a knuckleheaded coach. Let the gifted player take charge and see what happens. Falcons note: The player Jerious Norwood turned inside-out on his game-icing, 69-yard touchdown run was Carlos Rogers, a very highly paid No. 1 draft choice.



They need cheerleaders: "Gimme a G.! Gimme a 7!"

**Sweet Play of the Week No. 2:** Backup quarterback Derek Anderson scrambled 33 yards in overtime to put Cleveland into position for the winning field goal and the upset of Kansas City -- and no, I'd never heard of Derek Anderson either. Kansas City Chiefs: If you can't hold a 14-point fourth quarter lead against the Cleveland Browns, then your defense is still terrible. Often when a starter goes out injured and an unknown enters the game, the defense relaxes. But coaches are supposed to know this. Sunday, Herman "I Honor My Contract When I'm In the Mood" Edwards looked like he assumed the game was over as Anderson trotted into the huddle.

**Sweet Play of the Week No. 3:** Game tied at 13, Dallas faced third-and-5 on the Jersey/A 15 in the fourth quarter. The Boys lined up with an empty backfield and with two wideouts left and three right; Terry Glenn came in motion left to right; at the snap he took a simple flare pass behind the three right receivers and ran for the first down. Dallas scored a touchdown two snaps later and prevailed.

**Sweet Sequence:** Game tied at 17, the Flaming Thumbtacks reached fourth-and-11 on the Colts' 42 with 12 seconds remaining. Jeff Fisher sent Rob Bironas, career long of 53, out to attempt a 60-yard figgie. "This is a mistake," said my 11-year-old, Spenser. "If Tennessee misses Indianapolis gets the ball at midfield with one timeout, enough to throw once down the middle, then maybe stop the clock for a field goal try the other way." Sure enough Fisher asked for timeout, thought this through, then pulled the kicking team and sent in the punt unit. Indianapolis called its final timeout, in order to switch in its punt return team. "Now Tennessee can try the kick, because the Colts are out of timeouts," Spenser said. Sure enough Fisher changed course again, sending Bironas back into the game -- and his 60-yarder was straight and true to win. And I don't wish to alarm anyone, but Vince Young is already 5-4 as a starter.

**Sour Set of Plays:** If you have a couple minutes to kill, count the Vikings who either stood around doing nothing, or jogged at half speed, during Chicago's punt-return touchdown and interception-return touchdown. Minnesota Vikings: You are highly overpaid professionals, how about breaking a sweat? Bears note: After leading the league in return touchdowns in 2005, Chicago already has five return touchdowns this season. But you can't count on return touchdowns. Clubs that count on defense and special teams to score touchdowns often pull up short in the postseason.

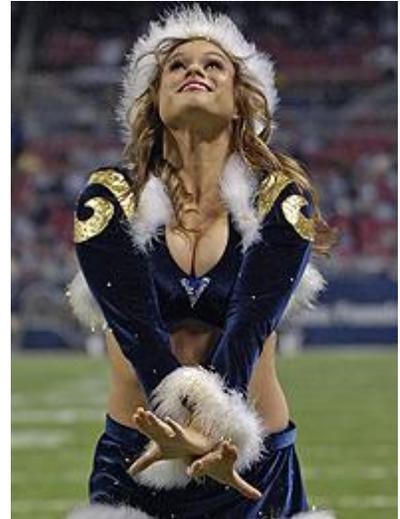
**Sour Single of the Week:** Last week four Giants defenders stood around doing nothing on the decisive down of Tennessee's comeback win. This week it's Dallas and Jersey/A tied at 20, Cowboys' ball on their 32 with one minute remaining. The Giants rush three, Dallas sends out four - - meaning eight defenders have dropped into coverage against four receivers. TMQ counted one, two, three Jersey/A defenders simply standing like topiary, doing nothing at all, as tight end Jason Witten streaked up the field for the 42-yard catch that positioned Dallas for the winning kick.

**Sour Defeat of the Week:** St. Louis lost to Arizona *at home* -- ouch. Afterward, Marc Bulger blasted his teammates for quitting on the season, and Les Mouflons sure played like a team that has quit. Offensive linemen standing around doing nothing, receivers carelessly letting passes bounce off their hands for interceptions -- it was ugly. First-year coach Scott Linehan should have benched a lot of starters by the third quarter. Instead he stood watching.

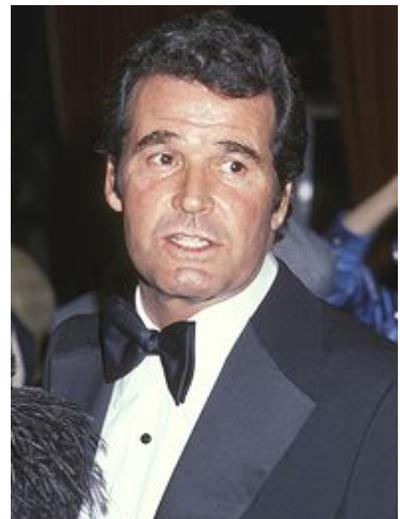
**"Monday Night Football" Analysis:** Jake Delhomme cost Carolina the Washington game a week ago with a crazy interception heave-hoed into coverage, and cost Carolina the Philadelphia game Monday night with two crazy fourth-quarter interceptions heave-hoed into coverage. The trouble is his backup, Chris Weinke, is 1-15 as a starter, and Carolina carries no third quarterback on its roster. So it's not like the Cats' coaches have a broad range of choices. If you watch tape of the Panthers' Super Bowl season, you'll notice Delhomme was heave-hoeing into coverage then, too. But his luck was good and the passes were usually caught; now the passes are being intercepted. I don't think Delhomme has lost his touch, as the sports-yak world is now saying; I think he's always been forcing the ball into coverage, had good luck for a while, and now his luck has run out. Monday night Jeff Garcia forced a pass to a covered Donte' Stallworth, who made a great play for a 51-yard reception, and the "Monday Night Football" booth crew praised Garcia. Two plays later he again forced a pass to a covered Stallworth, near-interception, and the booth crew slammed Garcia for throwing into coverage. The quarterback's read and throw were nearly identical on both downs. All of us tend to downplay the role of luck in outcomes, wanting to believe merit and effort decide everything. Lady Luck is often the arbiter. As [James Garner's Maverick said](#), "Luck is the lady that I love the best."

**Sweet 'n' sour Monday night play:** Trailing 7-0, the Eagles faced first-and-goal on the Panthers' 8. Philadelphia lined up five-wide, but Carolina was not in its dime, not expecting a five-wide at the goal line. (Although with the Eagles, you should.) On the right side the tight end ran an "out," then Brian Westbrook ran the down-and-in behind him. Because Carolina didn't have its dime on the field, Westbrook was covered by linebacker Thomas Davis, easily outrunning him for the touchdown. That was sweet. Davis, who played safety in college, wasn't even close to Westbrook when the pass arrived, and a former safety should be able to cover a back out of the backfield. That was sour.

**Blocking note:** Ultra-enormous Philadelphia tackle Jon Runyan completely outplayed Carolina defensive end Julius Peppers, so Delhomme was hardly the sole Panther to have a bad night. A couple years ago I stood next to Runyan and asked him my standard question for NFL players who seem impossibly large: "What does the sky look like on your home world?" When I asked this of Vernon Davis of the Niners, he smiled and laughed. Runyan just stared at me. Jon, you need to catch up on your science fiction.



The cheerleaders brought their A game, yet St. Louis lost to Arizona at home! Verily, the football gods have waxed wroth toward the Rams.



Riverboat ring your bell, fare thee well Annabel ... wait, this has to have something to do with the NFL!

Lame NFC note: The slumping Panthers play the slumping Giants on Sunday, and hard as it seems to believe, the winner will occupy the inside track for a wild-card slot.

**The Railroad Trusts, Standard Oil and Sunday Ticket on DirecTV -- Congress, Why Has One of These Monopolies Not Been Busted?** As the stalemate between NFL Network and the cable carriers continues -- NFLN wants an arm-and-a-leg to allow its Thursday night slate to be shown, and Comcast and Time Warner keep saying no -- corporate executives at NFL Network's offices in California must be rending their garments and gnashing their teeth. Why? The first two Thursday games were duds. Had they been thrillers, football lovers would be ringing up Comcast and Time Warner to complain. As it is, few cared about the two games most of the country didn't see. Wonder what will happen to the pace of negotiations the morning after the first exciting Thursday night game?

Frustration about what games you see or don't see is nearly universal among NFL enthusiasts. Peter Kurtz of Houston reports he was in Dubai on the day of the fabulous San Diego-Cincinnati game -- which could not be seen in the capital of the U.S. of A., but was shown to the oil sheiks of the Persian Gulf. Peter Staunstrup of Copenhagen reports Denmark saw the San Diego-Cincinnati game our nation's capital was not allowed to see. Steve Panos of Toronto reports that throughout Canada, NFL Network is already on basic cable -- meaning Canadian viewers get better access to NFL games, played in stadia funded by American taxpayers, than American taxpayers do.

Josh Zelechowski of Baltimore, currently living near Chelyabinsk, Russia, and working on the destruction of chemical arms of the former Soviet Union, reports he gets American Forces Network: The military channel that, as this column has documented, offers U.S. servicemen and servicewomen overseas a better choice of NFL games than do Fox or CBS here. Kevin Brady, a Foreign Service officer serving at the United States Embassy in Rome, reports he watched Bolts-Bengals on AFN, while Washington, D.C., was forbidden by NFL rules to watch that fantastic game. TMQ is very glad that servicemen and servicewomen and diplomats overseas get a great choice of the most appealing NFL contests -- every year at least one airman or Marine writes me to say that a downside of coming home is he or she will lose the ability to see the best NFL contests! Why not solve this problem, NFL, by expanding choice from other nations to the United States? Consumer choice is *the* trend throughout the economy, so much so that even the biggest and most powerful companies have given in. Among large commercial enterprises the NFL is nearly alone in insistence that it will shove what it wants down consumers' throats: and that is a formula for professional football to fall from its lofty perch.

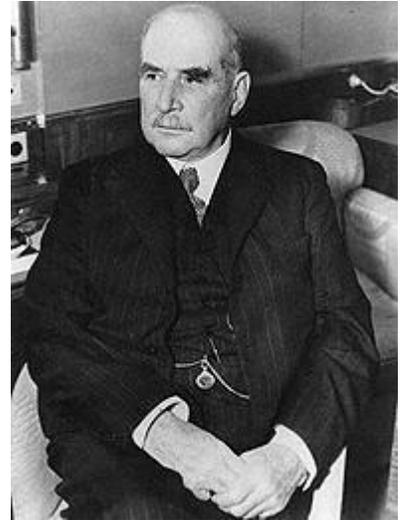
This brings us to the real scandal in NFL broadcasting -- not the dispute about NFLN, but that the wonderful Sunday Ticket package, which allows consumers to bypass this problem by paying to see any game, can only be seen by the lucky few with DirecTV. Friends who have DirecTV tell me it's wonderful. But I can't get DirecTV, and millions of others can't either. Anyone who lives around trees or tall buildings cannot on a technical basis receive DirecTV; the phrase "anyone who lives around trees or tall buildings" describes half the United States. For example Bob Crane of Columbia, S.C., a Chicago Bears fan who tried to buy DirecTV, couldn't because the satellite signal cannot be received where he lives. Crane writes, "I was and am still furious that even though I was willing to pay the fee to see my Bears, a monopoly deal leaves me no way to obtain the service."

The wonderful NFL Sunday Ticket, restricted via NFL cartel arrangement to customers of DirecTV in the United States, is available to any cable customer in Canada, as noted by many frostback readers, including Kevin Heselton of Regina, Saskatchewan. This means Canadians get better access to NFL games, played in stadia funded by American taxpayers, than American taxpayers do. Is there somehow some need for the NFL to forbid all but DirecTV customers from choosing any game -- does this somehow advance the NFL business model? No, because as many international readers including Alex McLeish of Beaconsfield, United Kingdom, have reported, anyone who lives outside the United States can now watch any NFL game live by signing up for a Yahoo! [streaming video service](#). Live outside the United States? The NFL is happy to let you watch whatever game you please. Are you an American whose taxes paid for the NFL's stadiums? Sorry, you are shafted.

In 1961, the pre-merger National Football League received an antitrust exemption from Congress, partly in return for its promise that all game broadcasts would be available equally to all Americans. For a decade, the most desirable broadcast service the NFL offers, Sunday Ticket, has been denied to the majority of Americans who don't or can't get DirecTV, in seeming defiance of the league's promise to Congress. Last year the NFL signed a contract that extends the cartel till 2011, and the reason was simple, DirecTV paid a lavish fee. But DirecTV shouldn't be able to buy something that violates at least the spirit, if not the letter, of the NFL's 1961 promise to Congress. As the new Congress takes its seat, the Senate Judiciary Committee has announced it will investigate NFL dealings with DirecTV. Sure the NFL and DirecTV signed a contract, but it's one that violates a public trust -- and Commissioner Roger Goodell, it will go better for you and the sport if you amend the Sunday Ticket deal on your own terms, rather than waiting for Congress to alter it for you. Unless, of course, you'd rather surrender the NFL's antitrust exemption.

**Untouched Touchdown Runs of the Week:** No Buffalo defender touched LaDainian Tomlinson on his 51-yard touchdown -- which came against an overstacked rush defense with eight in the box. No defender touched Tomlinson on his 2-yard, game-icing touchdown -- which came against an overstacked rush defense at the goal line. Both runs were off-tackle left behind guard Kris Dielman and tackle Marcus McNeill.

**Repeatedly Touched Touchdown Run of the Week:** Human bowling ball Maurice Jones-Drew of Jax bounced off half a dozen Dolphin defenders on his way to a game-icing, 32-yard touchdown. Hey NFL defenders, this guy is hard to tackle \_ quit hitting him high and bouncing off, go for his ankles. Miami announced the crowd as a sellout at 73,160, slightly below capacity, but thousands of spectators changed into orange or teal seat costumes around halftime. End zone sections were practically empty by the middle of the third quarter. Miami fans \_ how about being true to your school! Just like you would to your girl, guys! Hmm, maybe Miami fans were being about as true to their team as they would to their girl. (Note: Allusion to the Beach Boys' song, whose original lyric was "just like you would to your girl, guys" and whose PC version is now "just like you would to your girl or guy.")



J. Pierpont Morgan's cartel was busted by Congress. Now Congress should bust the cartel that prevents millions of Americans from choosing for themselves what Sunday NFL game to watch.

## **Sophisticated Analysis of George W. Bush's Body Language Shows He Reacts to the Words "Democratic Congress":**

My friend and former boss Charlie Peters, founder of the wonderful magazine [Washington Monthly](#), once said most of sociology could be boiled down to producing proof that hungry men want to eat. Last week, the august New York Times (that's the august newspaper, not an August issue) ran a page-one story offering irrefutable proof that as the Giants staged their epic collapse at Tennessee, the expressions of Giants' coaches and players were negative, while Titans' players acted happy! Sideline photographs of Tom Coughlin looking grim and Vince Young smiling were presented as if representing an incredibly scientifically advanced revelation about human nature. More, the Times declared that it had not only looked at some video of Giants and Titans players on the sideline, but presented the pictures for analysis to "Tonya Reiman and Maxine Lucille Fiel, [who] do not know much about football, but are fluent in body language." Reiman and Fiel gave the Times the amazing information that they could tell which team was winning and which was losing *just by analyzing who looked happy and who looked sad*.

According to the Times, Reiman is "a public speaker based on Long Island and has evaluated Terrell Owens." Fiel is "a writer and consultant based in Queens, who has evaluated baseball players, golfers and the racehorse Funny Cide." We're never told what, exactly, it means to have "evaluated Terrell Owens." Nor did the Times tell readers what, if anything, it might mean to have "evaluated" a horse. ("The horse feels conflicted today. He's trying to balance career and family.") According to her [Web site](#), Tonya Reiman is a "body language expert" who can "show you how to unlock the keys to personal success and self-mastery by learning how to read the emotions of others." Setting aside that it is impossible to unlock a key, I evaluated Tonya's performance on [The O'Reilly Factor](#). I feel she was nervous, insecure, overly aggressive and clearly compensating for something. Maybe she worries that she's passing herself off as a "body language expert" when *there isn't one single person on planet Earth who doesn't already know that people act uncomfortable when they're under stress and jovial when things are going well*. [Maxine Fiel](#) calls herself a "body language expert" who is "listed in the prestigious Marquis Who's Who in North America." Who's Who, once an important source of biographical information, has in recent decades become a vanity press. Now you [can list yourself](#), and the publisher then sells you [a copy of the volume for \\$710](#).

Upcoming New York Times front-page articles:

- Two experts who do not know much about college students use sophisticated analysis of body language to determine that at parties, many college students are thinking about sex.
- Food, drink linked to weight gain.
- Fistfights a sign of anger, experts find.

**'Tis Better to Have Rushed and Lost Than Never to Have Rushed at All:** Trailing 10-0 late in the third quarter, City of Tampa reached first-and-goal on the Pittsburgh 3. In this situation, the Bucs simply *must* score. A touchdown is much better than a field goal, but trailing by two scores with a quarter remaining, the Bucs simply *must* score. Pound the ball three times and a touchdown is likely. Instead pass, interception, and Pittsburgh takes the ball the other way for the icing touchdown. Passing at the goal line can be especially ill-considered because stuffed runs leave the opponent pinned, while an interception in the end zone is a touchback, giving the opponent the ball on the 20, which is where the Steelers took over.

**Um, That Was Adequate:** Results of the Jets' first-half possessions at Green Bay: field goal, touchdown, touchdown, touchdown, touchdown. Note: For six weeks Jersey/B has been using the no-huddle exclusively, first team in years to do so. Packers' defenders looked unprepared for the tactic.

**Capitalism Will Make a Movie About the Hanging of Capitalism:** The new movie "Fast Food Nation," which ridicules fast food as a corporate conspiracy, is produced by the cinema division of Rupert Murdoch's News Corp., a multinational. "An Inconvenient Truth," which tells us big corporations are destroying the world, is distributed by Paramount Classics, owned by Viacom, a multinational. Many recent thrillers and action movies depict big corporations as evil, and the movies are produced and distributed by big corporations. Presumably this happens because the evil corporation is a hackneyed cliché of screen writing, and in recent years Hollywood has produced little beyond hackneyed clichés. But consider: Perhaps sinister big corporations have some secret reason for wanting us to think big corporations are sinister.

**Buck-Buck-Brawckkkkkkk:** Early in the fourth quarter, uber-underdog Detroit reached fourth-and-1 at the New England 8, leading 18-13. Now it's late, and TMQ's immutable law, Kick Early Go For It Late, dictates going for it. But even more important than TMQ's law -- if such a thing can be imagined -- the Lions are 2-9 and have nothing to lose. Fortune favors the bold! Go win the game! And now they are 2-10. As Detroit's field goal boomed, putting the Lions ahead 21-13, TMQ wrote the words "game over" in his notebook: meaning Detroit's chances were over. From the point of the mincing fraidy-cat field goal to when all-naughts showed for New England's victory, the Patriots staged two long drives for 15 points while the Lions had just seven snaps, and on them turned the ball over three times. As TMQ always notes, when a coach goes for it in situations like this, he tells his team he is challenging them to win. When a coach orders a mincing fraidy-cat kick, he tells his team he assumes they will lose, and wants to limit the margin of defeat.

**Kick Early Go For It Late:** How did this immutable law do overall this weekend? Game scoreless, the Jets reached first-and-goal on the Green Bay 6 on their first possession, followed the law, kicked early, and cruised to victory. Tennessee trailed heavy favorite Indianapolis 14-0 when reaching fourth-and-5 on the Colts' 7 in the second quarter, followed the law, kicked early, and went on to victory. Then again the Arizona (Caution: May Contain Football-Like Substance) Cardinals prevailed though violating the law -- the Cards went for it on fourth-and-goal from the St. Louis 1 early in the game, failed, yet still won.

**Take the Sack!** Maybe Jay Cutler will be a fast learner. In the second quarter, Denver leading 10-0, Cutler was under tackle by three Seahawks and instead of just taking the sack -- "take the sack!" all viewers in the Easterbrook household were calling at the screen -- he heave-hoed blindly into the air, interception, touchdown return. Then in the third quarter, Cutler was again hemmed in by three from the Blue Men Group on the same play-fake, looked up, saw he was doomed, and took the sack. So that's progress. But it is unclear how it counts as progress for the Broncos, who entered the game 7-4 and playing at home with the greatest home-field advantage in the NFL, to lose owing to a rookie starter. There's a month remaining in the regular season -- does anyone believe Cutler will be a playoff quarterback in a month? But then, the switch to Cutler by Mike Shanahan might spare Denver the need to work on playoff game plans.

**10 Weeks Out of Service To Prevent Those Annoying Hour-Long Repairs:** Actual notice recently on the Brookings Institution intranet: "The Otis Elevator Company will be undertaking a complete replacement of the electronic and mechanical equipment that operates our elevators. To do this, one elevator in each building must be taken out of service for 8-10 weeks. After those elevators are back in service, the other elevator in each building will be shut down for the next 8-10 weeks. No doubt this will cause some inconvenience to all of us and, frankly, you won't notice any improvements once the elevators are back in operation. They won't be faster or look any different. But they will be more energy efficient and more reliable." Wait -- they're shutting down the elevators for 10 weeks *in order to make them more reliable?*

**The Football Gods Continue to Repay New Orleans:** Reggie Bush scored four touchdowns but lost control of the ball on two of them; running in the clear on another play, he auto-fumbled, losing the ball out of bounds. This is something New Orleans has to correct. Meanwhile the Saints benefited from challenging their own play. Mike McKenzie intercepted and ran the ball back to the San Francisco 1, where he fumbled and the Niners recovered. Saints' coach Sean Payton challenged the ruling, maintaining McKenzie was down by contact earlier in the runback -- and the zebras sided with the home team. In 2005 everything went against the Saints, and in 2006 everything's going in their favor.

**Is This Glass Half Toxic or Half Safe?** "The cancer-causing chemical dioxin should be cleaned up to a new, much higher standard, the National Research Council said yesterday." -- Washington Post. The National Research Council has found that "Americans exposed to small doses of dioxin, a toxic chemical, may face less risk from cancer than previously believed." -- New York Times, same day. Download the [32-page executive summary](#) and figure it out for yourself.

**How Long Until Some CEO Flies in an Entire Personal Airbus 380 to a Conference to Denounce Fossil Fuel Waste?** In recent years Tuesday Morning Quarterback has charted both the profusion of corporate-sized jets -- so many that it's becoming difficult for the rich to park their planes at Aspen, Nantucket and other glam destinations -- and advent of the Boeing Business Jet and Airbus Corporate Jet. The BBJ is an entire Boeing 737 converted for the use of a single CEO, government official or plutocrat; the ACJ is an entire Airbus 320 converted for the same purpose. (Both planes normally seat up to 140 passengers.) Governments of mid-sized nations have been ordering BBJs and ACJs for their top officials -- the Czech Republic just ordered three. Aviation insiders call such planes "Air Force One Juniors," intended to stroke the egos of government officials by making them feel so important that they, just like the president of the United States, fly in their own personal jetliner. The Czech Republic has a population of 10 million, about the same as the population of New Jersey: yet its leaders feel the country must have *three* Air Force One Juniors, so that not just the prime minister but the Foreign Secretary and the head of the Czech military can have an entire jetliner devoted to personal comfort. Privat Air, a European charter company, recently converted a Boeing 757, a larger plane, into a one-person luxury cruiser. It is now for rent to governments -- so that on that special occasion, any country can pretend to have an Air Force One Junior.

It's distressing when CEOs use shareholder money to buy themselves BBJs or ACJs, which can cost \$100 million fully fitted with luxury features such as king bed apartments. (Boeing says there are now 88 BBJs in [operation around the world](#), and refuses to disclose the buyers.) It's distressing that spoiled CEOs claim they need entire jetliners to themselves as an anti-terrorism tactic. ([Go here](#), then click "BBJ," then "utility," then "security.") It's distressing that soaring above the clouds in their \$100 million shareholder-funded extravagances, CEOs sign memos cutting health care benefits for working people. It's distressing that governments of impoverished nations in Africa have purchased BBJs or ACJs to stroke the egos of their corrupt dictators. But what's really distressing is the latest news: now an entire Boeing 737 converted to the personal use of a CEO is no longer enough! Boeing has begun to market personal 747s and 787s, while Airbus is taking orders for a personal version of the upcoming A380, the world's largest aircraft.

Lufthansa Technik, a German firm that converts planes built as passenger jets into personal luxury skycruisers, says there are now 39 VIP versions of the 747 in the world -- and that's not counting the actual Air Force One, a converted 747, or Air Force Two, the converted 747 that Vice President Dick Cheney absurdly has at his personal disposal. Technik says the VIP 747s cost an average of \$230 million each, about \$180 million to buy the airliner used and another \$50 million to add

luxury features. Fifty million dollars to *add luxury features*. Bear in mind this is only a little less than the price of the most expensive home ever sold in the United States, the Palm Beach estate of billionaire Ronald Perelman, which sold in 2004 for \$70 million -- and that 33,000 square-foot mansion covered six acres of valuable oceanfront land. A Boeing 747, one of the world's largest airplanes, normally seats about 400 people. A luxury-refitted 747 has almost 5,000 square feet of interior space, twice the size of the typical American home. Some of the VIP 747s have been converted for corporate use, several are owned by Persian Gulf oil sheiks, and a few have been refitted exclusively for the use a single individual.

Eyeing the growth in flying luxury liner converted from used aircraft, Boeing and Airbus will offer VIP versions of their new 787 and A380 as soon as the planes are flying. The new Boeing 787 Dreamliner, due at airports in a couple years, is expected to sell to airlines for about \$180 million and seat 300 passengers. Last month, Technik [unveiled its concept studies](#) for a personal luxury 787, expected to cost around \$250 million. In Technik's proposed layout, the VIP 787 "master stateroom" has "his and hers bathrooms." There are also "two en-suite guest cabins." More: "The dining and conference room with full communication facilities is a prime feature of the design, highly visible on entering the plane. The centrally located feature dining table seats 10 for elegant and comfortable dining, in fully certified seats. Dinner service is effortlessly carried out from the buffet credenzas on either side of the dining table. Full height wardrobe storage is provided for guest coats and bags. As required, a 42-inch plasma screen can rise up from the credenza to the aft of the dining table. This room can be privatized from the entrance hall and forward lounge by solid sliding doors. The integrated movie theatre is a complete entertainment extravaganza. It is the ideal live entertainment venue as well." Plasma TVs everywhere -- you're going to climb aboard your own private \$250 million mega-luxury jet and *just watch television?*

Most overdone and offensive will be the personal version of the A380, a jetliner designed to carry about 600 passengers. The personal version will be called the VVIP380 and will sell for \$400 million or more, depending on the level of interior luxury. Technik says it expects at least 10 VVIP380s will be purchased, and implies most will be bought by oil sheiks. Because the A380 has two decks, in a corporate-jet version, one entire deck would be reserved for the CEO, the other deck for underlings. [Go here and have a look for yourself](#). Airbus calls the proposed plane "a flying palace."

**At Happy Hour in Hell's Sports Bar, There's No Cover Charge -- But You Can't Leave:** Hell's Sports Bar has 28 wide-screen plasma TVs, and on Sunday they all showed St. Louis getting steam-cleaned *at home* by Arizona. For the highlight program, all 28 screens in Hell's Sports Bar showed nothing but, over and over, Green Bay attempting a field goal when trailing 31-0.

**Houston Texans Sack-O-Meter:** Houston won 23-14 -- and the Texans had minus-five yards passing.

**Huh? What?** When the Falcons-at-Redskins collision ended, Fox could have switched to the red-hot conclusion of Lions-at-Patriots, a Fox-rights game. Instead the network switched to the final minute of Arizona-at-St. Louis, a woofers pairing and a game where the Cards led 34-13 anyway.

**Wacky Food of the Week:** Darren Staley of Millers Creek, N.C., notes that deep-fried sweets are the rage at state and county fairs. According to a recent Los Angeles Times article by David Pierson, deep-fried Twinkies and deep-fried Oreos were a hit at this summer's Los Angeles County Fair. Pierson added, "At the State Fair of Texas, known for introducing the first corn dog in 1942, a vendor who won the best taste category last year for his deep-fried peanut butter, jelly and banana sandwiches has stolen headlines again this year for inventing deep-fried Coke. Other items making the rounds include deep-fried macaroni and cheese, deep-fried spaghetti and deep-fried cosmopolitans -- a pastry filled with cheesecake and topped with cranberry glaze and a lime wedge." Deep-fried Coke turns out to be a frying batter based on Coca-Cola. Don't the sponsors of county fairs want their patrons to survive to return the next summer?



They'd be even more healthful and delicious deep-fat fried.

**Oh Ye Mortals, Trifle Not with the Football Gods:** Halfway through the 2005 season, Willis McGahee was leading the league in rushing, and pronounced himself "the best back in the NFL." Since that moment, McGahee has rushed for 1,125 yards and scored four touchdowns, while LaDainian Tomlinson had rushed for 2,058 yards and scored 40 touchdowns. On Sunday, Tomlinson and McGahee met, LT/2 outrushing Willis by 152 yards. Note: Two weeks ago, TMQ called San Diego "the team to beat" in the NFL. Since then, the Bolts have barely bested Oakland and Buffalo.

**TMQ's Christmas List:** Worried that your dog isn't watching enough television? For Christmas, get [Rover the Dog Tales](#) a video designed to be watched by canines. The images contain no reds, which dogs can't see. The manufacturer advises owners whose dogs are alone all day to *leave the television on* with the video playing on continuous loop. For yourself, how about this [attractive electronic head massager](#).

**Blame the Song Girls!** In Florida and Michigan they must have stared at their television screens in disbelief, then leapt for joy. Not because of the ending of the USC-UCLA game, rather, for the second-to-last play. The Bruins faced fourth-and-5 on their 25 with 13 seconds remaining, the heavily favored Trojans out of timeouts and needing a touchdown to seal their invitation to the BCS title game. At that point USC had one, and only one, hope: Block the punt. Yet not only did Pete Carroll not send at least eight men -- and TMQ's law of punt blocks holds that you must send eight to block a punt -- Carroll sent only six! Four others peeled back toward the return man. The USC coach wagered that his team was more likely to return a punt the length of the field than block a punt with an all-out rush. Boom went the punt to the Trojans' 12, and boom went USC's BCS championship hopes.

Traditionalists might say UCLA simply played better, but reader Ryan Gray of Los Angeles has the true explanation: USC's renowned Song Girls caused the defeat. Gray notes in mid-November as the Trojans defeated Cal, clinching the Pacific-10 title, the Song Girls danced with roses, symbolizing the Rose Bowl. Before the BCS system, a Pac-10 title did confer a Rose Bowl trip, and in those days it was appropriate for the Song Girls to dance with roses at the moment the title was won. But not only does the BCS system scramble who goes where -- more important, as Gray pointed out in an e-mail two weeks ago, this year at the moment USC beat Cal, the only way the Trojans could end up in the Rose Bowl was if they *lost* one of their two remaining games, to Notre Dame or UCLA.

Which is what happened. Rather than play for the BCS crown, Southern Cal is now Rose Bowl-bound. Blame the cheerleaders -- they are the ones who used their beauty and wiles to beseech the football gods with roses!

BCS note: Sportscasters insist on saying its formula is a mix of computer numbers and "human polls." Once again the Klingons aren't consulted on an important matter! No wonder by the 23rd century they will be embittered against the United Federation of Planets. Can't we just say "polls?" Humans are, at this early stage in history, the only life forms known to engage in polling.

**Small Guy Plays Tall:** Last Friday night, Spenser and I went to watch Sherwood High at Northwest High in the Maryland 4A semifinals. I don't know any kids or parents at either school, but wanted one last look at Deontay Twyman of Sherwood, Maryland's best prep player for the past two years. I assumed it would be a last look because Sherwood is an undersized team, and Twyman is an undersized player, a 6-foot 170-pound quarterback; Northwest was a heavily favored, undefeated powerhouse with several enormous D-I prospects. Plus the wind was whipping at 30 mph, sure to neutralize Sherwood's pass-oriented attack \_ Twyman has 78 career touchdown passes, a huge number for a high school quarterback who plays against big-school competition. Anyway, Twyman has been such a magnificent prep athlete, I wanted to watch him one more time. It turned out not to be his final game, as visiting Sherwood prevailed with Twyman putting on one of the finest one-man shows I've ever seen in sports. He threw through the wind for a touchdown and several key first downs, while Northwest's more-publicized quarterback heaved interceptions; Twyman, a passer by nature, took off running again and again when the wind gusted, rushing for three touchdowns; he executed a key fake punt; he recorded several big hits at safety. A dozen times this player made something out of nothing under a heavy rush, repeatedly causing Spenser -- who's already a little jaded about football -- to say "Wow!"

Yet Twyman has received no D-I scholarship offer owing to his stature. This coming Friday night, Sherwood plays for the Maryland state major-school championship against Suitland, another local power, at M&T Bank Stadium, the Ravens' home. College scouts, attend this game! Deontay Twyman might be only 6-foot-0, but I've seen few players in my life with his combination of athletic ability, football IQ and total determination. He could be a star if he was 5 feet tall.

**Obscure College Score of the Week No. 1:**

Massachusetts 24, New Hampshire 17 (Division I-AA playoffs.) Located in Durham, N.W., the University of New Hampshire has [an 8,361-word parking policy](#). The United States Constitution is 4,400 words. Check Article XII, Section III of the University of New Hampshire parking policy for some of the silliest empty verbiage you will ever behold.

**Obscure College Score of the Week No. 2:** Northwest Missouri State 28, Chadron State 21.

(Division II playoffs.) Located in Chadron, Neb., Chadron State has [a 28-page faculty evaluation manual](#).

**Obscure College Score of the Week No. 3:** Saint John Fisher 31, Rowan 0. (Division III playoffs.)

Located in Glassboro, N.J., Rowan University was once called Glassboro State, but in 1992



We promise not to make any something-in-your-stocking jokes about these outfits.

changed its name in recognition of a gift of \$100 million from Henry and Betty Rowan. The school's newspaper is called [The Whit](#). A "whit" is something negligible.

**Reader Animadversion:** Got a complaint or a deeply held grievance? Write me at [TMQ\\_ESPN@yahoo.com](mailto:TMQ_ESPN@yahoo.com). Include your real name and the name of your hometown, and I may quote you by name unless you instruct me otherwise. Note: giving your hometown improves your odds of being quoted.

**Next Week:** Following the lead of William & Mary, Rowan University renames itself Henry & Betty.

**Tuesday, December 5, 2006**

**Updated: December 6, 11:19 AM ET**

TMQ Nation fires back

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By Gregg Easterbrook

**Rashad Mahmood of Cairo, Egypt**, asks, "Is there anything you could do to make Tuesday Morning Quarterback actually appear in the morning? Living in Cairo, which is plus-7 hours from Eastern Standard Time in the United States, a mornings-published TMQ for me would be the perfect end-of-the-workday, low-productivity-zone reading. But alas, I often don't get TMQ until Wednesday morning in Egypt, and then it cuts into prime morning productivity time." Rashad, TMQ is published "noonish Eastern," and what I always tell people on this point is that noon Eastern is still morning in four of the five time zones of the United States. So the column name is 80 percent truthful, and that's pretty good by the standards of modern marketing.

**D. Jeffrey Over of Geneseo, N.Y.**, writes, "In regard to placebos, [in a placebo study](#), participants ranked pain on a 1 to 10 scale, after either being given 'acupuncture' that was actually a spring tipped needle that never penetrated the skin, or swallowing an 'advanced pain relief medication' that was just a sugar pill. Not getting acupuncture turned out to reduce pain better than not taking a drug!"

**Don Aldrich of Minneapolis** semi-defends NASA by saying the space agency is not doing nothing at all about the risk of a comet or asteroid hitting the Earth -- [here](#) is a table of "near-Earth objects" NASA has identified so far, and [here](#) is a utility that allows you to estimate their movements. But my point was that NASA is doing nothing whatsoever to design or even research devices that might stop a comet or asteroid approaching our world. Hardly reassuring, since NASA's own tables say the agency already has identified 835 "potentially hazardous" asteroids near Earth.

**Professor HollyAnn Harris**, chairwoman of the chemistry department at Creighton University in Omaha, Neb., writes, "I am a rabid football fan but an even bigger fan of the well-written word. I enjoyed Tuesday Morning Quarterback for several years when you were on NFL.com and I was very disappointed when I could not find you this season. I just stumbled across your column on ESPN this morning and was delighted to discover TMQ there. I figure I have a month's worth of joyful reading ahead, as I catch up with your past columns."

Many readers including **Kevin Bartram of Bremerton, Wash.**, noted Bill Belichick called the rarely seen actual double reverse against Chicago: Tom Brady handed off to a running back, who handed off to a receiver going one way, who handed off to another receiver going back in the original direction. Three handoffs, actual double reverse. Result of the play? What you'd expect -- loss of 8. On my item about NFL coaches only blaming their players, **Eric Overpeck of Indianapolis** was among many to note that the day after the Bears lost at New England, Lovie Smith said, "I made a lot of bad calls."

**Dave Dyroff of St. Louis** points out [this article by Douglas Abrams](#) recounting 10 recent acts of good sportsmanship in high school sports. Good news -- the count is up to 10!

**Kama Siegel of Portland, Ore.**, notes that not only do the enormous new jetliner-based CEO flying palaces waste fossil fuels and emit greenhouse gases -- their contrails might [contribute to global warming](#). On the private-jet parking problems at Aspen airport, **Mike Monroney of Aspen, Colo.** writes, "I live across Highway 82 from the Aspen airfield, and can confirm the absurd number

of jets parked there during the holidays and any other BIPIDs: Beautiful Incredible People Important Dates. More, two-lane Highway 82 becomes a parking lot every morning as beautiful people and realtors try to force their way into town. Imagine being a movie mogul who spends 90 minutes flying 800 miles here from Los Angeles, only to sit in traffic for another 30 minutes to go the final three miles."

Readers, including **Monique Carlen of Pasadena, Calif.**, asked how my generic predictions are doing. So-so -- Home Team Wins is currently 109-83, better than Chris Mortensen's forecasts but trailing the rest of the crew on the [ESPN predictions board](#) and trailing the ESPN computer, which simply endlessly predicts that the team with the best statistics will win. Home Team Wins also is doing better than the picks of [USA Today football writer Jarrett Bell](#) (the paper's board updates Thursday). My off-price private-label exact final score -- Home Team 20, Visiting Team 17 -- is, however, blazing hot. This outcome has happened five times so far this season, most recently Sunday at Long Playing Field. If you'd endlessly predicted Home Team 20, Visiting Team 17 this season, you'd have been right five times. I bet among full-time NFL touts who use their incredible insider information to predict exact final scores, there isn't anyone in the country who's been right more than once, versus my five right!

Perennially, Tuesday Morning Quarterback complains that the NFL opens Pro Bowl voting before the season is complete -- that is, before anyone knows who belongs in the Pro Bowl. **Justin Duiguid of Washington, D.C.**, reports, "Not to be outdone, the NBA opened [All-Star balloting](#) three weeks into the eight-month season. Most teams had played about eight games at that point, making the nominees the 9.75 Percent All-Stars." More proof that professional sports all-star recognition is a popularity contest, not a measure of who's best.

**Dustin Riley**, an alum of TMQ's favorite obscure college, Indiana of Pennsylvania, reports the nickname-less school has narrowed its choices to three: the Crimson Hawks, the Gray Wolves or the Crimson Thunder. Here is [the school's poll](#). Sounds to me as though whoever chose this list rigged it for the Crimson Hawks because "the Gray Wolves" sounds like a squadron of German submarines and the Crimson Thunder doesn't have much graphic potential -- you can see lightning, but you can't see thunder.

Years ago, TMQ read about Professor Hal Rothman of the University of Nevada at Las Vegas, who was studying the sociology of Vegas stripper culture. This seemed a sensible idea; today, several million Americans enter striptease and lap-dancing clubs in Vegas in any year, or attend Vegas topless dance revues, which increasingly are marketed to couples. Why not study this? But what Rothman had done was create a perfectly legitimate reason to spend substantial amounts of time inside lap-dance lounges, interviewing beautiful women who take their clothes off for a living. TMQ decreed a Hal Rothman Award, which, for a few years, I gave to the man who invented the cleverest legitimate reason to gawk at naked babes, or the woman who invented the cleverest legitimate reason to gawk at shirtless hunks. Now comes the awful news that Rothman has contracted amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (Lou Gehrig's disease). As you know, there is no cure. Friends say his spirits are good, given the circumstances. Hal, hang in there. The University of Nevada hopes to endow a scholarship in his name. If you wish to donate, [go here](#) and select the Rothman scholarship fund under "designation."

Finally, a few weeks ago, TMQ commended to readers the latest Human Development Report, the annual United Nations publication that charts progress and challenges in the developing world. A century from now, who won the Rose Bowl will be forgotten but whether our generation helped lift the world out of poverty will be viewed as critically important. I've learned from the United

Nations technical staff that 115,224 people jumped from Tuesday Morning Quarterback to the Web site of the United Nations Development Programme to read about the report -- among the largest single-day viewings the United Nations' Web presence has ever had. Add to that number by checking out the report [here](#).

**Monday, December 11, 2006**

**Updated: December 12, 8:10 PM ET**

Ravens good, Manning bad

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By Gregg Easterbrook

Andy Reid isn't merely the coach of the Philadelphia Eagles, he is "head coach/executive vice president of football operations." Jim Mora isn't merely the coach of the Atlanta Falcons, his full title is "executive vice president-head coach." Mike Holmgren isn't merely the coach of the Seahawks, he is the "executive vice president of football operations/head coach." Imagine trying to explain to Vince Lombardi why modern coaches need this verbiage to make themselves feel important.

Such inflated coaching titles pale, however, in comparison to the 3,795-word gag-me-with-a-spoon official team bio of Denver's "executive vice president of football operations and head coach," Mike Shanahan. According to the [official bio](#), Shanahan is a "key leader" of "elite status" who is "ultra-impressive" and possesses an "exceptional talent" leading to a "stunning record" that puts him in an "exclusive club" plus has "dynamic drive" and has achieved "an almost unparalleled level of success" in "an atmosphere of great pressure and expectations" during "magnificent seasons" that made the Broncos the "perfect symbol" and is "arguably the finest head coach" with "one of the most brilliant minds in football" and has "one of the most dynamic minds" and is a "brilliant coach" who is the "most fertile football mind" who has "almost completely revitalized" his team while achieving "dramatic achievement" and is "dynamic" and "renowned" and gives "superb guidance" and stands "among the game's sideline greats" and is "universally regarded at the highest level" as "an ultimate leader." Move over Albert Einstein, Ernest Hemingway, Joan of Arc, Nelson Mandela - - you are flyspecks on the windshield of history compared to Mike Shanahan. Don't you get the feeling Shanahan personally supervised his bio? Hey, coach, people of genuine achievement don't have to boast. From now on, to this column Shanahan will be The Ultimate Leader.

In other football news, at the end of last season as the Colts honked out of the playoffs yet again, Tuesday Morning Quarterback offered this unsolicited advice to Peyton Manning: Make no commercials or public appearances, do no endorsements or golf tournaments, focus on nothing but football until you reach the Super Bowl. Now it's holiday buying season and Peyton Manning is ubiquitous in television advertising, while the Colts have lost three of four. MasterCard, Sony, DirecTV, ESPN, Sprint: Maybe we should save time by listing the big corporations Manning *hasn't* filmed a commercial for in 2006. On Sunday, the Indianapolis receivers dropped passes and the Colts' defensive front seven quivered like a bowl full of jelly against Jacksonville, but Big Brother looked out of sorts, too. During one extended sequence the Jax defense forced Peyton Manning into an interception, followed by a sack, followed by eight consecutive incompletions. Manning's chance to attend the Super Bowl might be folding its tent and stealing off into the desert, yet he continues to devote time to being Mr. Endorser. Manning films most commercials during the offseason, but even film work "in the can" generates distractions during money time. Colts' players



Emperor Hadrian may have been deified, but even he could only dream of bearing the title, The Ultimate Leader.

snap on the television, they see Peyton hawking Gatorade, it's not conducive to concentration or team harmony. A decade from now Manning will regret that he didn't totally focus on football and win a ring when he had the chance.

In more news, the score was Baltimore 13, Kansas City 3 with 12 minutes remaining and Chiefs facing fourth-and-6 on the visitor's 39. That cannot be the punting team coming on the field -- *Aaaaaiiiiiiiyyyyyyeeeee!* I rent my garments and cried aloud to the football gods, but it was too late. You're down by two scores in the fourth quarter and you are punting from the opponent's 39! Needless to say as the punt boomed TMQ wrote the words "game over" in his notebook, and I barely even need to mention the Ravens took the ball the other way for the touchdown that sent the home audience headed up the tunnels to the parking lot. NFL coaches will do anything to shift the blame from themselves to their players, but this fraidycat punt took the cake. Plus with Baltimore's defense so difficult to drive against, when did Herm Edwards think he was going to get a better opportunity to mount a comeback?

This raises the question of the Baltimore defense. The Bears have been producing spectacular defensive stats plus turnover touchdowns, though teams such as Buffalo and Philadelphia are producing turnover touchdowns too; turnover touchdowns depend to no small amount on luck. The Broncos' defense was hot in the first half of the season when it was playing conventionally, though now it is fading down the stretch as, predictably, coaches begin to call blitzes and surrender big plays. The defense I wouldn't want to face right now is the Baltimore Ravens'. As of last night the Nevermores' defense has passed Chicago's, and is allowing the fewest points in the league. They've got power personnel at every position. Linebacker Bart Scott, undrafted out of Southern Illinois in 2002, is having a terrific season. The Baltimore secondary is strong, including Samari Rolle, whom Tennessee considered washed up; the defensive ends are strong, including Trevor Pryce, whom Denver considered washed up. Rookie tackle Haloti Ngata has made Ray Lewis a hot commodity again, by tying up the middle and keeping blockers off No. 52. (Ngata is the defensive Rookie of the Year; the Bills and Raiders, which considered then passed on Ngata in the draft, might regret that decision for a long time to come.) Coordinator Rex Ryan, son of the blitz-addicted Buddy, has resisted the urge to go blitz-wacky, instead usually playing a conventional position-oriented scheme. And linebacker Adalius Thomas has been all over the field, making a legit bid for the league's defensive MVP. Thomas plays special teams, too. For the Baltimore defense, it's Super Bowl Run: The Sequel.

In other news, Brett Favre is chasing Dan Marino's all-time record for touchdown passes -- Favre needs eight more. This column has chided Green Bay coaches for calling Favre's number too much at the goal line in a transparent attempt to reach the record. On Sunday, Packers' coaches instead showed exceptional sportsmanship. Leading 30-19, Green Bay had second-and-goal on the San Francisco 5 at the two-minute warning. It was a perfect opportunity to run up Favre's touchdown stat -- and instead Green Bay coaches ordered Favre to kneel three straight times, the Packers making no attempt to score. Regaining possession on their 8-yard line with 37 ticks remaining, the



He did not insist on being called Senior Executive Chief Operating Officer for Coaching.

Niners acknowledged the gesture by kneeling once to end the contest. High school and college coaches, please take note!

And in other news, readers of lads-mag FHM have named their cheerleader of the year. Today, Tuesday Morning Quarterback names his Man of the Year. See details on both below.

**Stat of the Week No. 1:** Buffalo and Miami began the season a combined 3-11 and have since gone a combined 9-3.

**Stat of the Week No. 2:** Jacksonville outrushed Indianapolis by 341 yards.

**Stat of the Week No. 3:** City of Tampa has one touchdown in its past three games.

**Stat of the Week No. 4:** Cleveland lost by 30 points, then beat a team with a winning record, then lost by 20 points.

**Stat of the Week No. 5:** Chris Weinke had almost twice as many passing yards in one game (423) as in his previous four seasons combined (244).

**Stat of the Week No. 6:** Seattle is 8-5 and leads its division, despite being outscored this season.

**Stat of the Week No. 7:** Willis McGahee averages 133 yards in starts against the Jets, and 79 yards in starts against all other NFL teams.

**Stat of the Week No. 8:** Jacksonville's possession sequence during the second and third quarters: touchdown, touchdown, field goal, touchdown, field goal.

**Stat of the Week No. 9:** Chicago return man Devin Hester has more touchdowns (six) than Chicago starting tailback Thomas Jones (5).

**Stats of the Week No. 10:** We don't wish to alarm anyone, but Arizona has won three of its past four games.

**Cheerleader of the Week** This week's can be only [Bibiana of the Dolphins](#), just voted "America's sexiest cheerleader" by readers of FHM. According to her team bio, Bibiana was born in the Dominican Republic, owns three horses and became a Dolphins' cheerleader as soon as she turned 18. Life is tough down in Miami: [here](#) the Fins' cheerleaders visit Bimini. Note the warm-to-the-touch [Dolphins' cheerleader swimsuit calendar](#) no longer includes shirtless Dolphins' players flexing their muscles, a 21st century marketing innovation that didn't work in terms of sales.

**Sweet Play of the Week No. 1:** Leading 7-3, San Diego faced second-and-1 on the Denver 4. The Bolts lined up with a full-house backfield, Philip Rivers not exactly under center but not far enough back to be in the shotgun. Rivers took the snap and handed the ball forward between the legs of fullback Lorenzo Neal. Rivers and LaDainian Tomlinson sprinted right; Rivers faked an handoff to a receiver simulating an end-around right; Neal faked a block, the defense unaware he had the ball; then the blocking back sprinted left



The DR's loss is Miami's gain.



The overwhelming majority of Page 2 staff would meet Bibiana under the mistletoe.

for the touchdown. Sweet! The CBS announcers declared this a "fumblerooski," the trick play pioneered at the University of Nebraska. But it wasn't. On a fumblerooski, the quarterback deliberately places the ball onto the ground, the backs sprint right and then the right guard picks the ball up off the ground and runs left. Both the NCAA and the National Federation of High Schools have made deliberately leaving the ball on the ground illegal. Why? Trick plays of this variation are a lot of fun to watch.

Many readers, including Jason Hill of Louisville, Ky., thought it was unsportsmanlike for Marty Schottenheimer to send Tomlinson back into the game when the Chargers took possession on the Denver 7 with three minutes remaining and a 41-20 lead. Schottenheimer wanted Tomlinson to set the touchdown record, as he did on the next snap. But with San Diego ahead by 21 and the game nearly over, shouldn't Tomlinson have been comfortably seated on the bench? Normally stars should exit once victory is assured, but in this case sending Tomlinson back in made sense. He got the record at the conclusion of a home victory; the sideline and home faithful could celebrate freely because the game was locked up. That was more fun than if Tomlinson had attained the record at, say, a tense moment during a close game, or on the road. The Broncos understood and did not consider what happened a rub-it-in score, and thus there was no sportsmanship problem.

**Sweet Play of the Week No. 2:** Trailing Jersey/B 10-7 in the second quarter, the low-voltage Buffalo offense faced third-and-3 on its 23. Lee Evans ran one of those short dinky-dunky routes that many NFL offenses use on third-and-short; two Jets' defenders jumped the short route; then J.P. Losman pumped and Evans took off, 77-yard touchdown with no Jersey/B defender in the picture as Evans scored. A bold play-call from the Buffalo Ivies! That'll give Dick Jauron and Marv Levy something to talk about at the Bills' sherry hour. (In Buffalo, coaches conferences are called "faculty meetings.")

Bills' note: The opposite of Mike Shanahan's Hadrianic self-deification is Buffalo's austere 306-word [biography of Jauron](#), which doesn't even tell you the coach's hometown.

Jersey/B note: Sunday's Jets' performance is an argument for turning off the scoreboard. Taking the field for the late game, Jersey/B players knew Kansas City had lost, enhancing its playoff chances. While the Jets and Bills clashed, the scoreboard kept flashing the news that New England was being shut out by Miami. Each time a Miami-New England score was shown, the Jersey home crowd roared. You had the feeling Jets players were paying more attention to that scoreboard than to the need to defeat the opponent in front of them.

**Sweet Play of the Week No. 3:** Leading 20-10 at Carolina in a battle to see which preseason contender would get written off, Jersey/A faced third-and-goal on the Cats' 3. Little Brother Eli Manning faked a "stretch" handoff right, then threw a touchdown pass to David Tyree running a quick turn-in from the right slot. The fake handoff not only was sweet but looked exactly like Peyton Manning faking the stretch handoff.



Bibiana certainly is alluring, but way overdressed for the FHM audience.

**Sour Play of the Week:** Can it be the New England Patriots seemed ill-prepared and out-coached at Miami? New England has lost games during the Belichick era, but never looked sloppy -- and on Sunday, New England looked sloppy. Plays just weren't run correctly. Trailing 13-0 early in the fourth quarter, the Patriots had possession on the Dolphins' 33. The ball was direct-snapped to running back Kevin Faulk, who lateraled to Tom Brady, who threw a touchdown pass. Except it wasn't a lateral, Brady was way in front of Faulk, making Faulk's throw a forward pass and Brady's throw an illegal second forward pass. Three downs later Brady was sacked and lost a fumble; the rest was filler. Rules note: As recently as 2004, the Faulk-Brady play would have been legal in high school. National Federation of High Schools rules once allowed two forward passes if both were thrown behind the line of scrimmage, but now the NFHS has switched to the pro standard.



He just turned down the Alabama job, too.

Something's-wrong-with-Belichick note: Trailing 3-0, the Flying Elvii faced fourth-and-7 on the Miami 42 and Yoda *ordered a punt*.

Doctor, would you examine Mr. Belichick please? Belichick punts in the Maroon Zone less than any NFL coach, this being one reason for his success. The punt traveled a paltry 19 yards as the football gods showed their displeasure.

**Monday Night Football Analysis:** "Stay in your lanes! Stay in your lanes!" Coaches from the middle-school flag level to the NFL shout that at kickoff teams. Apparently no one on the St. Louis sidelines shouts this, because on Devin Hester's first kickoff return touchdown, there was not a soul in blue and gold on the left side when Hester cut back. Hester's second kickoff return touchdown, making the count 42-20 and icing the contest, came up the middle. The Bears were expecting an onside kickoff on that play, meaning Hester ran a kickoff back 96 yards for a touchdown *when Chicago had its "hands" unit on the field*, the blockers being skinny guys, not linemen. If the Rams special teams can't bust a wedge made up of cornerbacks and receivers, that's really pathetic. And why didn't Les Mouflons onside? The home team had just made it 35-20 with 7:35 remaining. St. Louis needed two scores plus a deuce. The coach's choice was to onside kick, squib-kick to keep the ball out of the hands of the NFL's most dangerous return man or boom it deep to the NFL's most dangerous return man. Scott Linehan chose the third option. TMQ won't be surprised to see Chicago opponents begin deliberately kicking off out of bounds, offering the Bears the ball on their 40 in order to keep it away from Hester.

Bears note: Chicago's remaining opponents are Tampa, Detroit and Green Bay, combined record 10-29. An epic collapse is all that stands between the Ming Ding Xiong ("Bears whose outcomes are decided by fate" in Chinese) and home field throughout the playoffs. Rams note: Trailing 21-13 in the middle of the third quarter, game still contested, St. Louis faced third-and-1 on its 31. The Rams averaged 4.6 yards rushing on the night. Just run the ball! Instead St. Louis coaches called a pass, and not a play-fake attempt to go deep for big yards, just a dinky-dunky short-slant thingee intended to gain five yards. Incompletion. Now it's fourth-and-1. Go for it, you're 5-7, what do you have to lose? Boom goes the punt, and I scarcely even need to mention the Bears took the ball the length of the field the other way for a touchdown. And now the Rams are 5-8.

**Dolphins Sack-O-Meter:** Joey Harrington has been sacked less in his nine games as the Miami starter than Daunte Culpepper was sacked in his four games. As to Miami tactics, Jason Taylor has switched this season to a hybrid defensive end-linebacker position, similar to the old "elephant" role played by Charles Haley in his heyday. Taylor has been terrific, and if Miami were playoff-bound, would be a contender for defensive MVP. On Sunday, Dolphins coaches reached still further back into the past and let Taylor be a 1960s University of Michigan style "monster man," lining up wherever he pleased. New England blockers clearly could not figure out the rhyme or reason to where Taylor was, and he gave them fits all day. The reason New England blockers couldn't figure out the rhyme or reason to Taylor's movements was that there wasn't any -- Taylor was using his instinct to decide for himself where to line up on each down. Essentially, Taylor was calling his own plays. In the hyper-organized NFL, it's interesting to see that giving a top player the green light to use his instincts worked out really well.



Santa, the reindeer coach, Fireball and Donner were all guilty of nose-ism against Rudolph.

**Sweet 'N' Sour Matched Set:** Against San Francisco, Favre play-faked right, bootlegged left and threw 36 yards for the touchdown to Ruvell Martin on the streak left. A couple hours later against Seattle, Matt Leinart play-faked right, bootlegged left and threw 56 yards for the touchdown to Bryant Johnson on the streak left. The two plays were all but identical, and equally sweet. Equally sour is that no one at all from the Niners' secondary covered Martin on this action, and the Seahawks let Johnson go deep on this action single-covered with no safety in the picture.

**Fortune Favors the Bold!** Trailing Dallas 7-0, the United States Saints went for it on fourth-and-1 in the Maroon Zone. The call was a reverse -- first down and the Saints score on the possession to tie the game. As the play began, I thought the Saints were crazy -- reverses are slow developing-plays and there's always penetration on fourth-and-short. But every Cowboys defender, save one, followed Reggie Bush when he took the handoff, and the reverse man beat that lone defender.

**Fortune Doesn't Favor Bad Tactics!** Now it's New Orleans 42, Dallas 17 with the Cowboys facing third-and-5 at the Saints' 13 at the end of the third. Dallas absolutely must score a touchdown on this possession or the home crowd can head up the tunnels to the parking lot. That the Cowboys absolutely had to score on the possession dictated "two-down" thinking -- assume you will go on fourth down, and call a play that will gain at least some yards. Instead Dallas coaches called a shot at the end zone, incompleting. Then on fourth-and-6 after an exchange of penalties, Dallas coaches called another shot at the end zone -- interception -- and the parking lot seemed a more attractive place to be than the stands.

**Failure to Read TMQ:** Last week's column said of Jax human bowling-ball Maurice Jones-Drew, "Hey, NFL defenders, this guy is hard to tackle -- quit hitting him high and bouncing off. Go for his ankles." Game scoreless, Indianapolis linebacker Cato June had Jones-Drew in his sights, and tried to grab him around the shoulder pads. Jones-Drew bounced off, spun away for an 18-yard touchdown and the Jags' fantastic rushing day was under way. Later on Jones-Drew's 48-yard touchdown rumble, June again tried to tackle him high and bounced off. Hey, NFL defenders, this guy is hard to tackle -- quit hitting him high and bouncing off. Go for his ankles.

Indianapolis is last in rushing defense. Free-agency losses hurt, the Colts losing defensive tackle Larry Tripplett and linebacker David Thornton, the latter an underappreciated performer. The injuries to defensive tackle Montae Reagor and safety Bob Sanders hurt, as did defensive tackle Corey Simon deciding to impersonate the Hindenburg. This is Dwight Freeney's "contract year," and he's already cost himself maybe millions in bonus money with weak play. Roll it all together, and Indianapolis can't stop anybody. On Sunday the Colts couldn't stop Jaguar rushes, although by the second quarter, Indianapolis knew exactly what Jacksonville would do on every play. Jacksonville staged a 94-yard touchdown drive that was entirely rushes and an 81-yard touchdown drive that included only one 7-yard pass. Indianapolis' inability to stop the rush is doubly bad because every Colts' opponent wants to run and control the clock to keep the Colts' offense off the field. Has the chance for Peyton to win a Super Bowl already slipped by? Also, why was Big Brother still on the field with Jax leading 44-17 just before the two-minute warning?

**NFLN Update:** They are rending garments and gnashing teeth at NFL Network headquarters in California, as NFLN has now broadcast three Thursday night games and all have been duds. NFL Network was banking on outraged viewers calling their cable carriers to complain about the fabulous games they missed. Instead, so far NFLN games have been ones you're glad you missed. That will change at some point. There will be an NFLN thriller, and then the cable carriers and the league's network will get their heads together and agree on a reasonable price that allows NFLN to go mainstream.



Sure he won a bunch of titles and all that, but Vince Lombardi never had to square off against TMQ across a middle-school flag football gridiron.

But the fact that NFL Network game broadcasting has begun with a whimper rather than a bang makes it time to start thinking ahead to the next decade, when the league's current deals with ESPN, Fox, CBS and NBC expire. The NFLN live-game slate is an experiment; several influential NFL owners want the experiment to lead to the league taking over its own broadcasting in 2012, cutting out the established networks. My guess is that if this happened, it would kill the goose that lays the golden eggs, starting the seemingly invincible popularity of pro football into a cycle of decline. Several NFL owners labor under the mistaken impression that all ESPN and the other established networks are doing is "carrying" NFL contests, adding no value to them, and so they believe the NFL itself should broadcast its own games and keep all advertising and cable revenue.



They've got game -- but do they know the secret of Blast Gold?

This view is shortsighted. Today, ESPN and its established-channel competitors present NFL games on independent networks organized under journalism standards. That makes the games both more credible to viewers and more exciting. It's exciting to watch a game on ESPN or CBS in a way that will never happen with NFLN. The NFL Network does some things well for a project that's only in the third year, but it's always clear you are viewing an in-house corporate promotion channel. If in the future the NFL was broadcast entirely on an in-house corporate promotion channel, viewer interest would decline. Specifically, the NFL seems insufficiently appreciative of how much value has been added to its product by ESPN. There's a zany energy about ESPN no in-house broadcasting will ever offer. ESPN made it OK to be a total sports nut, OK to obsess about fantasy stats and the draft, OK to watch sports news during breakfast, OK to tape an hour of NFL highlights and review them slo-mo, OK to say to yourself "I live in the sports artificial universe, and I like it there." At the same time, ESPN made it OK to make fun of sports -- you can only enjoy the sports ecosphere if you admit to yourself it's fundamentally silly. (In literary terms, you need "ironic detachment.") The NFL never would have reached its current position of popularity and income without ESPN or something very much like ESPN. For the NFL to believe the league can someday go it alone in broadcasting, generating viewer interest unassisted, is classic obliviousness. "We've got all these golden eggs, why do we need the goose?" The NBA once thought it was invincible, and its ratings have fallen off the cliff. Constantly TMQ reminds: There's no law of nature that says the NFL must remain so popular.

**Arlen Specter, Tuesday Morning Quarterback Man of the Year:** On another broadcasting note, Sen. Arlen Specter of Pennsylvania, an influential figure on Capitol Hill, announced last week that unless the NFL makes Sunday Ticket available to anyone who wants to buy it, he will introduce legislation to revoke the NFL's antitrust exemption. All hail Arlen Specter! TMQ has been campaigning for years on the point that the monopoly arrangement, which Sunday Ticket is offered only to satellite customers of DirecTV, violates the NFL's 1961 agreement with Congress. That agreement granted the league an antitrust exemption in return for its promise that pro football programming would be offered equally to all viewers. Because many millions of Americans live in places where it is not technically possible to receive DirecTV, the Sunday Ticket monopoly seems an obvious breach of the NFL's accord with Congress. (DirecTV is great; it's DirecTV's monopoly over Sunday Ticket, not the satellite carrier itself, that's causing the problem.) "A lot of people, including myself, would like to be able to have Sunday Ticket and can't get it," Specter said. The

Pennsylvania senator also will press the NFL to cut the asking price for NFL Network, so NFLN can be shown on basic cable without necessitating a cable rate increase.

Football fans of America, you have Arlen Specter in your corner! It seems to me the Pennsylvania senator has found a potent populist cause, and for becoming champion of that cause, Arlen Specter is the 2006 Tuesday Morning Quarterback Man of the Year. Specter is the outgoing chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, and word is the incoming chairman, Sen. Patrick Leahy of Vermont, is also eyeing the NFL's antitrust exemption. TMQ said this months ago and says this again: Commissioner Goodell, reach some voluntary deal with DirecTV to end the monopoly now -- before Congress imposes a deal on you.

**So Judy, What Are Your Psychosocial Reasons for Wanting Ripped Abs?** Texas Christian University now offers *five* degrees in kinesiology, including a degree in movement science and one in "psychosocial kinesiology."

**Oh, Ho, the Mistletoe, Hung Where You Can See -- Somebody Waits for You, Kiss Her Once for Me:** Last week, I took out my Burl Ives snowman plush doll and put him on my Brookings desk --

it's the snowman from the Johnny Marks' "Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer" [claymation special](#) that has been playing annually on CBS since 1964. I know every word of that special, having watched it annually for 42 years, and I still get scared when Rudolph is alone on the ice floe and the menacing Bumble roars in the distance! And after 42 years, I'm convinced that the coach of the Reindeer Games is an idiot, probably punts in polar bear territory. Maybe he could take over the Crimson Tide program -- for that matter the reindeer coach might be the only one willing to take the Alabama job. Anyway, last January when I put the snowman doll away I remember thinking to myself, "It's not going to seem like that long till I put it out again." It didn't. This phenomenon of time accelerating as you age is palpably real.

**The Secret of Blast Gold:** Readers, including Rebecca Eisen of Chicago's Lincoln Park, asked how Spenser's flag football team fared. I am pleased to report the Cabin John Cougars recently completed an undefeated season and won the Montgomery County, Md., sixth-grade flag football championship. I have proven my theories work at the middle-school flag-football level -- that's Phase 1 of my ambitious plan for world football domination! My offensive theory of flag football is run-run-run, then play-fake and throw deep. My defensive theory, as you already have supposed, is never blitz. (We practiced blitzing because the players demanded it, but by the strangest and most amazing coincidence, during games the blitz call never got signaled in.) I pause to boast that I was also on the sidelines clutching a clipboard for the county championship won by my oldest, Grant, in eighth grade. We tied twice that year, but I've never lost a league game as a flag coach. Tuesday Morning Quarterback is the Vince Lombardi of middle-school county-league flag!

I also can report that my scouting department has developed a play that is 100 percent unstoppable, yet I have never seen run in any pro, college or high school game. In Grant's championship year and now Spenser's, I called this play -- Blast Gold in our nomenclature -- a total of nine times. The result was seven touchdowns averaging about 50 yards, plus two gains of about 30 yards. This innovative play just steamrolls defenses; I am in earnest, as they say. So NFL and college schools,



Senator Arlen Specter gives hope to little-guy football fans.

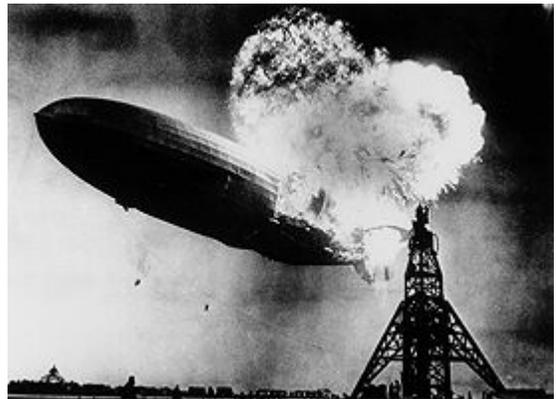
want to bid for a diagram of Blast Gold? Submit your offers using the link at Reader Animadversion.

**Crazy Pass Watch:** Leading 20-0, Minnesota had first-and-10 on the Detroit 13 and a chance to seal the contest by halftime. Brad Johnson, under pressure, heave-hoed a crazy pass that was intercepted and returned for a touchdown, making the game interesting. Johnson is supposed to be a savvy veteran -- just take the sack!

**TMQ's Christmas List:** Looking for something for the person who has everything? Reader Lloyd Crosby of Calgary, Alberta, suggests [this superyacht](#) from the Craig Loomes yacht [design firm](#) of New Zealand. Equipped with 16,400 horsepower worth of engines, the boat has a helicopter landing pad and grand piano bar. Price? Maybe \$100 million, topping the \$80 million that self-described "zillionaire" venture capitalist Tom Perkins recently paid for his custom yacht the *Maltese Falcon*. It is estimated that 30 years ago, there were about 200 privately owned large luxury yachts in the world; today there are believed to be about 6,000. The money that has been sunk, as it were, into these ego boats would have been sufficient to raise living standards across Africa. Instead it goes to indulge the filthy rich.

Actual gift suggestion: "The Brushback Report" by Dave Saraiva, a book of sports humor -- Onion-style lampoons of sports reporting. Great stocking-stuffer for any sports lover.

**Stop Me Before I Blitz Again!** In overtime, the Flaming Thumbtacks faced third-and-14 on the Moo Cows' 39. Houston blitzed seven, which was like handing out engraved invitations for Tennessee to score an easy touchdown; Vince Young scrambled for an easy touchdown, game over. Not only did Houston use an all-out blitz on a long-yardage down where the odds favored a defensive stop -- Tennessee was already out of field-goal range, so getting a sack was not the priority, getting a stop was the priority. (Yes Rob Bironas hit a 60-yard field goal a week ago, but the chance of him following up with a 58-yarder this week was not the sort of thing defensive coaches should worry about.) Buck-Buck-Brawckkkkkkkk note: Earlier in the game, Houston faced fourth-and-6 from the Tennessee 43 and punted. I scarcely even need tell you it took just one snap for the Titans to pass the point where the ball would have been, had Houston gone for it and missed. You're 4-8, what have you got to lose? And now you are 4-9.



The blimp represents Corey Simon in 2005; does the explosion foretell the Colts' playoff fate in 2006?

**Best, Worst Blocks:** The 61-yard screen catch-and-run by Reggie Bush was the backbreaker touchdown as New Orleans stomped on the Cowboys at Stonehenge Stadium. This play worked because of perfect blocking. Linemen Jamar Nesbit and Jammal Brown didn't just jog in front of the runner as offensive line so often do on screens, they both pasted Dallas defenders at the point of attack. And then they didn't just stop to watch as offensive linemen so often do on screen, each hustled downfield and made a secondary block. Brown wiped out the highly paid, highly hyped Roy Williams. On the flip side of the coin, Detroit was trailing Minnesota 30-20 with four minutes remaining and down to its last gasp with fourth-and-goal at the Vikings' 1. The Lions' offensive line gave so little effort, barely bothering to tap the Minnesota front, that Jon Kitna was hit one second after taking the snap, and was sacked. Minnesota didn't blitz on the play -- four Vikes' rushers all

but instantly overcame five Detroit blockers. The Lions rushed for negative yardage on the day, and their inability to punch the ball across after reaching second-and-goal at the 1 in this sequence was cover-your-eyes awful.

**Evolution of the TMQ Logo:** The Cincinnati Bengals are on their fourth or fifth uniform in as many years, and Tuesday Morning Quarterback, too, is an ever-shifting target from a design standpoint. Tuesday Morning Quarterback began at the online magazine [Slate](#). The first TMQ logo was a drawing of a gigantic quarterback in a polka-dot helmet being tackled by a tiny defender; [you can see it here](#). This out-of-whack illustration by Robert Neubecker conveyed the underlying goofiness of TMQ. The logo was dubbed "in the grasp."

Then Tuesday Morning Quarterback left for ESPN.com, where the first logo reversed the perspective: [gigantic defender, tiny quarterback](#). Around the office in Bristol, people said this looked a lot like Diron Talbot closing in on Roger Staubach -- who now [runs a realty company](#) and has a blog. So the second logo was dubbed Diron. The artist was Larry Johnson.

Always one step ahead of the posse, Tuesday Morning Quarterback skedaddled to NFL.com, where the first logo was, well, [let's try to forget the first logo](#). A staffer at NFL headquarters on Park Avenue dubbed it "rocket man." I called it "the flying hobo" and couldn't wait for its demise.

The flying hobo was [replaced by a colorful logo](#) designed by the art department of CBS Sportsline, which produces NFL.com. Initially this logo was called "glasses guy" for the obvious reason. Eventually the name became Fielding, suggested by NFL.com's editor, Mark Zimmerman. The figure reminded Zimmerman of Fielding Melish, nebbish protagonist of the Woody Allen movie Bananas. Plus, in the logo Fielding is attempting to field a punt. Surely, a preposterous punt!

Finally, the prodigal columnist returned to Page 2.

Artist Kurt Snibbe drew two new Tuesday Morning Quarterback logos -- "huddle up," showing 11 players clustered around a computer, and the current logo showing me at the keyboard wearing a helmet. Reader J.B. of Maryland immediately wrote to ask, "What are we going to nickname this one? Looks like John Hall wearing Gary Anderson's single-bar helmet." Reader Kristie Willworth of Bellingham, Wash., wrote, "It's the 21st century and TMQ is still composed using a bulky desk-hogging CRT monitor?"

Actually, Kristie, it is! My desktop PC is a Win 98 model manufactured in 1999. This is the subject of considerable kidding around Bristol, and occasional complaints. Once when my Internet failed on Tuesday at dawn, I couldn't file the column from home. My pre-USB desk PC can make only floppy-disk file copies. I drove to the local Kinko's with one, and the place had no equipment for reading a floppy disk! ("What is Easterbrook using, a Commodore 64?" was in the ESPN e-mail chain on that one.) Anyway someday I will get a desktop with 5.8 terabytes of memory and a one-molecule-thick flat screen, but bear in mind that the most effective PC security system is to work on a machine too antiquated to load Microsoft Office. Snibbe's snazzy second logo will, I hope, adorn the column for years, as it also adorns the [TMQ hats and T-shirts](#) you can buy in huge quantities for holiday gifts. And the new logo's nickname? Make suggestions using the address at Reader Animadversion.



Hermey the elf refused to chuckle. He needed to watch a little SportsCenter and lighten up.

**Ultimate Leader Analysis:** So Denver was 7-4 when The Ultimate Leader switched to rookie quarterback Jay Cutler, and is now 7-6. TMQ asked before Cutler took the field and asks again: How, exactly, does the dynamic, renowned and superb Mike Shanahan think an untested rookie can get the Broncos into the playoffs? Cutler did some things well and some poorly against San Diego, but he's unlikely to play into January. Or is it that The Ultimate Leader is failing to lead? In the fourth quarter, the Broncos quit on the game. Trailing 34-20 with seven minutes remaining, Denver went for it on fourth-and-2 from its 28. The Chargers rushed four against five Denver offensive linemen and a running back kept back to block. Yet with six to block four, Cutler was sacked no more than two seconds after the snap, Broncos blockers barely bothering to slow the rush.

**Tis Better to Have Rushed and Lost Than Never to Have Rushed At All No. 1:** Trailing 21-16 with five minutes remaining, Washington reached second-and-goal on the Philadelphia 3. The Redskins must get a touchdown here; they're playing at home, with crowd energy and their glamorous cheerleaders dancing in little more than Santa hats; to this point, Washington had averaged 5.3 yards per rush; pound the ball straight ahead against the Eagles' 29th-ranked rush defense, and six points are likely. Instead, incompleteness by novice quarterback Jason Campbell, then sack as Campbell sprints backward away from the objective, then field goal. Washington never touched the ball again.

**Tis Better to Have Rushed and Lost Than Never to Have Rushed At All No. 2:** Atlanta rallied to defeat Tampa, but the Falcons continue to have at least one goal-line disaster every week caused by coaches calling passes at the goal line -- and the Falcons are the NFL's No. 1 rushing team! Trailing 6-0 in the second quarter, Atlanta faced third-and-goal on the Bucs' 4. Pound the ball! Instead pass, interception. When the Falcons finally got around to rushing on a third-and-4 in the second half, the result was a 21-yard touchdown by Justin Griffith. On the play, Griffith turned Tampa safety Will Allen inside-out. When your starting safety cannot tackle the other team's backup fullback in the open field, your defense is a shadow of its former self.

**This Week's "Battlestar Galactica" Complaint:**

"Galactica" continues its descent from hot show to cancellation. Hey, producers, how about having Admiral Adama discover a planet where there are some writers? Friday's episode involved several ships being destroyed when the fleet decided to fly directly through the center of an active star-forming nebula of intense heat and radiation. But this is outer space, which is three-dimensional -- you don't need to go "through" anything, you go around! One character pronounced the nebula was "too big to go around," yet "Galactica" and its sister ships previously have been depicted as able to make instantaneous hyperspace jumps covering thousands of light-years. Flying directly through a dangerous area of space rather than simply going around it is a running theme of bad science fiction. As the conclusion of the "Deep Space Nine" Star Trek serial, a Federation battle fleet had to reach DS9 station to prevent a calamity; the sinister Dominion placed all its ships tightly together at one point between Earth and DS9; the Federation force blasted through the center of the bad guys, rather than just go around! As Douglas MacArthur said of ocean tactics where there is a lot of open territory and a few heavily defended positions, "Hit 'em where they ain't." This will someday be the rule of space combat.



Future historians will debate how Florida passed California as the cheer-babe capital.

**San Diego-Atlanta-Jersey/A Bottom Line:** LaDainian Tomlinson's ascent to likely MVP makes it time to weigh San Diego's double trade-offs of the top picks in the NFL draft. In 2001 and 2004, the Bolts traded away the draft's first choice, in each case used on the year's most desired quarterback. Taking into account players drafted with picks that moved in both deals and players released -- surely you remember Tay Cody -- here's the bottom line on the two deals combined. The Chargers gave up Michael Vick and Eli Manning, and got back LaDainian Tomlinson, Philip Rivers, Shawne Merriman and Nate Kaeding. San Diego seems to be the winner in this series of transactions. (It's common to hear that San Diego traded Vick for Tomlinson and Drew Brees, but this is wrong; Brees was selected with a choice the Bolts already had.) Now consider the financial bonus: Avoiding first-overall-pick bonus money on two occasions has kept the Bolts' salary cap in order.

**Obscure College Score of the Week No. 1:** Appalachian State 48, Youngstown State 24 (Division I-AA semifinals). Located in Youngstown, Ohio, Youngstown State has a [32-page student code of conduct](#) that includes a 27-step appeals procedure for disputed grades.

**Obscure College Score of the Week No. 2 :** Grand Valley State 49, Delta State 30 (Division II semifinals). Located in Cleveland, Miss., Delta State's women's teams are the [Lady Statesmen](#). We know a lot of contemporary college kids are gender-confused, but the Lady Men? South Carolina's women's teams are now just the Gamecocks, not the Lady Gamecocks, though this doesn't solve the gender-confusion issue since gamecocks are male. Cockfighting is also illegal in the United States except in Louisiana and New Mexico -- meaning not only are the women's teams of South Carolina gender-confused, both women's and men's teams are banned!

**Obscure College Score of the Week No. 3:** Wisconsin Whitewater 44, Wesley 7 (Division III semifinals). Located in Dover, Del., [Wesley's president](#) is "a former honorary commander" of Dover Air Force Base. Dr. Miller -- just sit in the chair, and for God's sake don't touch that red button!

**This Fulfills My Obligation to Say Something About the Cincinnati-Oakland Game:** As the Raiders stagger to 2-11, commentators looking for something nice to say have praised Oakland for possessing the league's No. 1 pass defense. But as demonstrated years ago by Aaron Schatz of Football Outsiders, losing teams often have pass defenses that look good statistically, because their opponents hold comfortable leads in the second half and don't throw. In 2005, three of the top four spots for passing defense were occupied by Green Bay, New Orleans and Cleveland, all losing teams.

**Sportsmanship Watch:** Many readers, including Samantha Dell of Portland, Ore., noted Lincoln University defeated Ohio State-Marion 201-78 in a Division III basketball game. Ohio State-Marion, a troubled program, dressed six players; Ohio State-Marion had lost its previous contest by 80 points; Lincoln University coach Garfield Yuille had his players full-court press in the second half to humiliate a helpless opponent. One Lincoln player attempted 41 three-pointers, continuing to launch treys when the school was ahead by more than 100 points. This is bottom-of-the-barrel behavior, and I give a lot of credit to Ohio State-Marion coach Mark Sisler and his six men for not simply walking off the floor so the game would end as a forfeit. What of the Lincoln coach? He's a victim! Yuille feels sorry for himself because people are criticizing his lack of sportsmanship. When coaches without class run up the score, instead of saying "I apologize" they invariably have a million excuses why they weren't responsible for their own actions. Lincoln University's basketball coach has [made his school's name nationally synonymous with bad sportsmanship](#), and instead of apologizing, he's all about excuses. But then it is people with dignity who apologize. Bad sports claim they weren't responsible.

And where were the gents in the funny shirts while all this was happening? The NFL and NCAA football rulebooks contain broadly worded provisions granting officials nearly unlimited authority to prevent coaches from engaging in actions that make a travesty of the game. My guess is there's a similar clause in the NCAA basketball officiating manual. Why didn't the officials order Yuille to show sportsmanship, and enforce such an order by, say, ejecting any Lincoln player who pressed or shot a three? Officials are not supposed to be passive bystanders. Among their duties is protecting the integrity of sport.

**Relief in Philadelphia:** "The Eagles cannot make the playoffs," said Terry Bradshaw on the Fox pregame show Sunday morning. The Nesharim are in! And "Football Night in America" guys, will you please stop laughing hysterically at your own wisecracks? It makes the show sound like a bunch of washed-up Catskills comics hanging around the [Carnegie Deli](#) trying to impress each other.

**Same Paper, Same Day:** "We're not exactly a nation of savers," according to a news story in yesterday's Wall Street Journal. But according to a story on the editorial page, Americans fail to save is a "myth" and a "persistent misconception."

**Reader Animadversion :** Got a complaint or a deeply held grievance? Write me at [TMQ\\_ESPN@yahoo.com](mailto:TMQ_ESPN@yahoo.com). Include your real name and the name of your hometown, and I may quote you by name unless you instruct me otherwise. Note: Yahoo! mail has experienced all kinds of technical bugs since introducing a beta a few weeks ago, so there will be a Reader Animadversion on Wednesday assuming the problems are fixed by then.

**Next Week :** Mike Shanahan commissions the construction of a Pyramid.

**Monday, December 18, 2006**

**Updated: December 20, 9:08 AM ET**

Time for a new playoff format

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By Gregg Easterbrook

Once again the NFL is hurtling toward weak teams reaching the playoffs while strong teams clean out their lockers for next season. This isn't funny -- and the solution is to make the NFL postseason a seeded tournament. What would happen if the NFL postseason was a seeded tournament? Games would be better and public interest would increase, that's all.

Last season 11-5 Chicago enjoyed a first-round bye and then played at home, while 12-4 Jacksonville got no bye and opened on the road. In 2004, three winning teams -- Baltimore, Buffalo and Jacksonville, all 9-7 -- were shut out of the playoffs while two 8-8 teams, Minnesota and St. Louis, were invited. In 1999, two 8-8 teams, Dallas and Detroit, made the postseason while a 9-7 team, Kansas City, did not; also that season 11-5 Buffalo opened on the road while 10-6 Washington opened at home. These examples could go on and on. The NFL playoff structure, with an automatic slot for each division winner and two wild cards per conference regardless of overall records, does not do what the NFL is supposed to be all about -- reward performance on the field. Almost every season, at least one team is rewarded in playoff terms for sheer luck regarding what conference or division it is in, while another that has performed better on the field is told to take off its Ace bandages and turn off the locker room lights until July. A seeded-tournament postseason format would change this.

Consider what we're hurtling toward this season. One or maybe even two 8-8 teams might make the playoffs from the NFC, while from one to several 9-7 teams could fail to advance from the AFC. It's not out of the question that an 8-8 team will reach the playoffs while a 10-6 team is told to disband. And if you're an NFC aficionado, remember this setup is as likely to hurt you as help you: in seasons when the NFC is strong, the current playoff format penalizes that conference while granting favors to weak teams in the AFC. If the season ended today, New Orleans at 9-5 would get a bye, while Baltimore at 11-3 and New England at 10-4 would play in the first round. With two weeks remaining it is possible San Francisco could win its division and play host to a home playoff game at 8-8, while it is impossible for Denver to open at home even if it finishes 10-6. A seeded-tournament format would ensure that the teams with the 12 best records advance to the playoffs, the teams with the four best records get a bye, and the teams with the eight best records open at home. Isn't ensuring that the *best* teams advance in the interest of the NFL?

Yes, there is tradition and sentiment attached to the league's divisions, and the division winner must receive a playoff slot or divisions lack meaning. But at the very least, the NFL could switch to a league-wide wild-card format. Under such a system the eight division winners would advance as they do now, while the four wild cards would be the four next best teams, regardless of conference. That's what a wild card is supposed to be for, after all -- to find places for teams that played well but were stuck behind a superior club in their division. As it is now, the wild-card format is a quota plan for the conferences: Each is assured of two extra slots regardless of performance. Once the season ends, I'll calculate what the playoffs would have looked like under a seeded tournament and under league-wide wild cards -- and I'll wager in advance that the pairings in either scenario would be more attractive than what we're likely to get from the current system.

NFL: *Changing the playoff format to reward the best teams could only cause interest to increase!* If you have further doubts, my closing argument: The NCAA men's basketball bracket. No postseason in any sport is more exciting, and it is a seeded tournament.

"Coach, can you see the scoreboard?" Often TMQ wants to holler this at coaches who seem oblivious to the big shiny numbers on the Jumbotron. Carolina trailed Pittsburgh 17-0 and had second-and-10 on the Steelers' 19 with seven seconds remaining in the first half, holding one timeout. John Fox ordered the field goal. Sure, kick early go for it late -- unless you're way behind and a loss ends your playoff hopes! With seven seconds and a timeout, a shot at the end zone was realistic. OK, so it's 17-3 at intermission. Flash forward to the end of the third quarter. It's Pittsburgh 20, Carolina 3 and the Cats face fourth-and-2 on their 25, the home crowd roaring at fighter-jet-afterburner decibels. Remember, a loss all but ends Carolina's season. In trots the punting unit -- and I scarcely even need tell you Pittsburgh took the ball the other way for a touchdown that made the lead 27-3 and caused TMQ to write the words "season over" in his notebook about the Cats. Wait, there's more! Now it's 27-3 in the fourth quarter, and Carolina faces fourth-and-16 from its own 13. Sure that's a long down, but you trail by 24 points and the greatest fourth-quarter comeback in NFL history was from 25 points. You've got to go for it! Carolina punted and the football gods, outraged, allowed the Steelers to return the punt for a touchdown. You're 6-7 and a loss all but concludes your season, why aren't you going for it? Now you are 6-8 and your season is over.

In college news, the NCAA wants us to stop saying "Division I-A" and "Division I-AA," instead saying "Football Bowl Subdivision" for Division I and "Football Championship Subdivision" for Division I-AA. Scholarship athletes are getting A's for classes they never attended at Auburn, but this is what the NCAA Board of Directors is wasting its time on! Supposedly this exercise in euphemism was triggered by I-AA schools feeling the AA suggested they were of lesser status. To me it always just made them sound like batteries. Anyway, many colleges that play AA football -- the Ivies, Bucknell, Colgate, Davidson, William & Mary -- are of substantially higher quality and status than the bowl-eligible crowd. From my standpoint this name change is Division I-AA doing Division I-A a favor by lending it prestige, not the other way around.

Also, note how the new euphemism moves the word "championship" away from the biggest schools. While the BCS system isn't exactly a part of the NCAA, the two exist symbiotically: The football-factory conferences rely on the NCAA to ensure they maintain control of money flow to the major bowls, and money flow is far more important to the football-factory conferences than choosing a true national champion. Which is what Division I-AA does, and congratulations to Appalachian State University of Boone, N.C. So the new euphemism -- [which the NCAA itself isn't yet using](#) -- in effect makes it official that the bowl system does not even attempt to determine a national champion. At least now that's official!

In Brett Favre news, Green Bay had four red-zone possessions against woeful Detroit, and Favre did not record a touchdown pass. Now he has two games this season in which to throw eight touchdown passes to take over the all-time career record from Dan Marino. From the Lions' 5-yard line, Favre threw incomplete, then the Packers kicked a field goal. From the Lions' 14, Favre threw an interception. On a Packers' first down on the Lions' 14, Favre did not throw and a running play scored a touchdown. On a first down on the Lions' 12, Favre threw incomplete, then threw incomplete again, then threw an interception. Bottom line? Favre had five passing attempts close to Detroit's goal line, resulting in two interceptions and three incompletions. On the fourth red-zone possession, Favre appeared nervous, aware his shot at the record was slipping away. You could almost see him thinking, "I've passed so many tests, just one more, just let me pass one more and I

can be content." But after all Favre has been through and accomplished, to become anxious about this final test seems mistaken. Brett and his coaches should just accept that he won't get this record, and try to make what might be this great player's final two games as relaxed as possible. Yes, it would be tremendous fun for Favre to finish as the all-time leader for touchdown throws, but that was always up to the football gods, wasn't it?

In other news, what's the best thing to happen to the Buffalo Bills since Jim Kelly and Bruce Smith? Their former coach Mike Mularkey went to work for the Miami Dolphins; see below. And rest easy previous holders Jersey/A, San Francisco and Tennessee -- the Seattle Seahawks have put on the mantle of Tuesday Morning Quarterback's Single Worst Play of the Season So Far. See below, too.

Christmas falls on a Monday this year, so there will be no TMQ next week. The column resumes on Jan. 2. Tuesday Morning Quarterback sends holiday best wishes to all space aliens, mega-babes and football enthusiasts. Bells are ringing all across the local star cluster!

**Stat of the Week No. 1:** Buffalo and Tennessee opened a combined 4-12 and since have gone a combined 10-2.

**Stat of the Week No. 2:** The Giants and Panthers are on a combined 1-9 streak. The only victory came when they played each other.

**Stat of the Week No. 3:** The NFC South is on a combined 0-10 streak.

**Stat of the Week No. 4:** New Orleans lost, and clinched its division title.

**Stat of the Week No. 5:** Florida's Bucs and Dolphins are a combined 3-10 at Buffalo and Chicago in December.

**Stat of the Week No. 6:** Chris Weinke is 1-17 as a starter.

**Stat of the Week No. 7:** Romeo Crennel is 1-11 in the division as the Browns' head coach.

**Stat of the Week No. 8:** Arizona has never beaten Denver.

**Stat of the Week No. 9:** Miami won 21-0 last week, and this week lost 21-0.

**Stat of the Week No. 10:** The Colts' first six possessions on Monday night: field goal, touchdown, touchdown, turnover on downs, touchdown, touchdown.

**Cheerleader of the Week:** Derek Swarz of Welland, Ontario, nominates [Amy of the Titans](#). According to her team bio, Amy is studying for a master's in exercise physiology, works as a claims adjuster for State Farm Insurance, and her biggest fear is storms. Amy, if you're afraid of storms, perhaps insurance adjusting is not your ideal occupation. Insurance companies might be less stuffy if they employed cheerleaders. Here are insurance cheers:

*Tote that barge, lift that bale, in six to eight weeks we'll put your check in the mail!*

*House destroyed by natural causes? You're not covered! Next time read the clauses!*

*RE-ject, RE-ject!*

Ontario note: As a boy I whiled away happy hours watching ships squeeze through the Welland Canal. Although the official Web site of the Welland Canal admits [this engineering structure is "not as well known as the ancient Egyptian Pyramids."](#) check the site to blow a container vessel's horn and see a lock-operation simulator. [Use this utility](#) to track the movement of ships through the Saint Lawrence Seaway.



Amy will cheer as soon as you satisfy your deductible.

**Sweet Play of the Week No. 1:** Philadelphia led 29-22, and Jersey/A had first-and-10 on its 20 with three minutes remaining. The Eagles showed what appeared to be a seven-man megablitz, but actually was a five-man zone blitz -- a defensive back and a linebacker rushed from the offensive right, while defensive end Trent Cole dropped into coverage on the offensive left. The zone blitz has two virtues. First is the well-known virtue that the offensive line might become confused about where the rush is coming from. The second virtue is little-known. When a quarterback reads blitz, he might look for a "hot" receiver in one of the areas that blitzers have vacated. But on a zone blitz when a defensive lineman drops into coverage, the hot receiver might have company instead of being all alone. Indeed, the fact that zone blitzes create uncertainty in the quarterback's mind about where it is safe to unload the ball is central to making the zone blitz effective. At any rate, Eli Manning thought it was an all-out blitz, and assumed the hot man left would be all alone. Instead Cole was there, made the interception and returned it for the icing touchdown. Just as offensive coordinators get complimented for well-designed plays, this was a sweetly designed defensive look by Eagles D-coordinator Jim Johnson.

G-Persons note: After becoming furious last winter when Tiki Barber criticized him after a game, Tom Coughlin continues to criticize Eli Manning in public after every loss. The quarterback's psyche is essential to football success. Be it right or be it wrong, Little Brother is the quarterback the Giants chose. Coughlin constantly denouncing his own quarterback in public is self-destructive for the Giants, plus just plain stupid on Coughlin's part. He can be replaced in the offseason a lot more easily than a first-overall drafted quarterback.

**Sweet Play of the Week No. 2:** Jay Cutler won for the first time, making the Broncos 1-2 since The Ultimate Leader decided to change horses midstream during a playoff run. TMQ remains suspicious of the strategy. Remember, playing in Once It Was Called Mile High Stadium is the greatest home-field advantage in football -- and as of Sunday when San Diego clinched the AFC West, it became impossible for Denver to open the postseason at home. Change one of the Cutler losses and the Broncos' position might be much stronger. But check Cutler's 54-yard touchdown pass to Javon

Walker. The rookie released the pass from the Denver 36, and Walker caught the ball at the Arizona (Caution: May Contain Football-Like Substance) Cardinals' 2, meaning the ball was in flight 62 yards. When John Elway was in orange, scouts and touts used to marvel at his ability to throw an accurate pass 70 yards. Now it's only Jay Cutler's third start and he has shown the same basic gift.

**Sour Play of the Week No. 1:** Trailing 24-10, Jacksonville faced fourth-and-goal on the Tennessee 1 with eight minutes remaining. The Jaguars have the league's second-highest ranked rushing attack; on the day, they average 5.1 yards per run attempt; three-quarters of NFL rush attempts on fourth-and-1 succeed. So did they pound the ball? Incompletion, and on the low-percentage jump-ball fade pattern to boot. 'Tis better to have rushed and lost than never to have rushed at all!

**Sour Play of the Week No. 2:** Dallas leading 7-0, Atlanta had second-and-10 at the Cowboys' 49 on the first snap of the second quarter. Michael Vick sprinted backwards all the way to his own 38 before heave-hoeing a crazy pass that was intercepted and returned for a touchdown by DeMarcus Ware. TMQ has asked this three times and will ask it a fourth: *Why do Atlanta coaches have Vick running backward so much?* The Falcons are sinking slowly into the sunset, and nearly all their calamity plays this season have come with Vick racing backward. Vick is the NFL's best running-quarterback threat since Randall Cunningham. When Vick executes conventional sprint-outs, he is devastating. On the conventional sprint-out, Vick is close to the line and can take off running; if the defense comes up to honor the run, then Vick throws. When Atlanta coaches tell Vick to race straight backward -- he often appears to be executing an eight-step or even nine-step drop -- Vick retreats away from the line and surrenders his running threat, while having to throw off his back foot falling backward, which is a recipe for fiasco. Now it's Dallas 31, Atlanta 28 with nine minutes remaining, the Falcons facing third-and-3 in a game in which they rushed for an average of 4.7 yards per carry. Did Atlanta power-run? Did Vick sprint out? Atlanta coaches called a shotgun formation. Vick raced backward, then threw incomplete; as the punt boomed, TMQ wrote the words "game over" in his notebook. *Why do Atlanta coaches have Michael Vick running backward so much?*

**Sweet 'N' Sour Play No. 1:** Game scoreless, Buffalo faced second-and-16 on the Miami 33. Blocking tight end Robert Royal, who has poor hands and rarely runs anything more than a short turn-out, took off deep downfield on a fly. He was supposed to lure a safety away from the intended receiver. J.P. Losman looked, looked left and seeing no one open, snapped back right and threw a 33-yard touchdown to Royal for the longest reception of the tight end's five-year career. Sending a guy who's never caught a long pass straight up the field on a fly pattern was sweet. Sour: Miami's defense totally ignored Royal, the corner on that side just watching him go by and covering no one, both safeties ignoring him. Hey, he's got bad hands, but nobody is that bad! Ignoring a deep receiver was sour. And we don't wish to alarm you, but Buffalo has won five of its past seven games -- with the only losses to Indianapolis and San Diego by a combined margin of four points.

**Sweet 'N' Sour Play No. 2:** Tom Brady flipped a screen to Kevin Faulk, who went 43 yards for the touchdown, a 17-0 Flying Elvii lead and the rout was on at Next One Will Have Seven Moisture-Sensitive Vibrating Heated Titanium Blades, Make Espresso, Raise Llamas, Monitor Atmospheric Pressure on the Moons of Meezpor, Improve Your Love Life and Play a Constructive Role in the Middle East Peace Process Field. It was a weakside screen and three offensive linemen -- Dan Koppen, Matt Light and Logan Mankins -- all got out in front of Faulk. That was sweet. But none of the linemen had to hit anyone because no Texan was in the picture for almost the entire run. That was sour. The Steelers' offensive line also blocked well on the screen pass touchdown to Najeh Davenport that turned the Carolina-Pittsburgh game into a rout.

**Sweet Tactics:** It's the week before Christmas, and football pundits are expressing shock that the New Orleans Saints lost a game. ESPN fact-checking department, please confirm that we have not fallen into an alternate universe. The underachieving Washington Redskins' defense was stout at the Superdome, and one reason was smart tactics. Unlike recent Saints' opponents, the 'Skins did not go all-out to stop Reggie Bush, rather, tried to take away the Saints' other options -- and it worked. The contest seemed another argument for turning off the scoreboard. By the second half, Saints' players knew from the scoreboard that Carolina was getting steam-cleaned by Pittsburgh, meaning New Orleans would make the playoffs win or lose. And you sensed that during the week, Drew Brees had been reading the newspapers and listening to sports-talk radio, wondering if he will get the league MVP. Drew, that always has been up to the football gods.

**Monday Night Football Analysis:** So it's Indianapolis 24, Cincinnati 13 midway through the third quarter and the Colts have second-and-goal on the Trick or Treats' 1-yard line. On a night Marvin Harrison has already caught two goal-to-go touchdown passes, from the 4 and the 3. To that point, Marvin Harrison had caught 118 touchdown passes overall, best of any active player and third-best in NFL annals. Earlier this season at New England, Harrison caught a short, goal-to-go touchdown pass, and twice in other games earlier this season Harrison caught touchdown passes when the Colts had a short goal-to-go situation. So where, oh where, might Peyton Manning throw? *Maybe to Marvin Harrison!* Yet Harrison was single-covered, and badly so: Touchdown, and the rest was filler.

Cincinnati's inability to cover a 6-foot, 185-pound man in a very small area at the goal line was emblematic of a TMQ theme -- that even with NFL clubs having dozens of coaches and scouts earning many millions of dollars and doing nothing but football full-time, teams fail to notice really basic stuff. Three times on "Monday Night Football" the Colts faced short goal-to-go situations, all three times Manning threw quick slants or quick fades to Harrison *exactly as they have done all season in this situation*, and all three times Cincinnati was in the wrong defense. All three times, no one jammed Harrison at the line. Harrison is a little guy by NFL standards and hates to be jammed; his worst games have come against the bump-and-run. Jamming Harrison at midfield is risky because he might get deep, but where is the risk in jamming at the goal line? All three times, the league's leading active touchdown receiver was single-covered at the goal line while at least two (on one play, four) Bengals defensive backs and linebackers stood like topiary, covering no one at all. And all three times the corner across from Harrison -- Deltha O'Neal, a highly paid former Pro Bowl gent -- at the snap *backpedaled*. It's the goal line, don't give ground! All Harrison needs is to run two yards and turn! Which is all he did, three times, resulting in three touchdowns.

**Even with NFL Clubs Having Dozens of Coaches and Scouts Earning Many Millions of Dollars and Doing Nothing but Football Full-Time, Teams Fail to Notice Really Basic Stuff:**

Now it's Indianapolis 31, Cincinnati 13 early in the fourth quarter, and the Bengals face fourth-and-7 on the Lucky Charms' 10-yard line. A really basic thing you should know about the Colts is that they score a lot. That means you've got to score a lot to beat them. Here Cincinnati trails by 18 in the fourth quarter. A field goal makes the margin 15 -- which might be overcome, but only if you prevent the Colts from scoring again in the game. Up to the point of this decision by Marvin Lewis, the Colts had scored on five of six possessions while recording 23 first downs. Is there any reason to think their offense will suddenly lurch to a dead halt? So you've got to try for the touchdown here; getting a touchdown at this juncture was Cincinnati's sole hope of a comeback. Boom goes the field goal, and the Bengals never threatened again. It was obvious at this juncture that Lewis was more concerned with containing the margin of defeat than going all-out to win. Want another example? Trailing 31-16 with 11 minutes remaining, Lewis had the Bengals punt from midfield. When it was

34-16 with 16 seconds remaining and it did not matter in the slightest whether Cincinnati tried for the first down or started square dancing, *then* Lewis went for it.

**Harvard Course: Fuzzy Math 101:** As higher education grows ever-more expensive and essential to success, the price of a bachelor's degree is becoming a barrier to social equality. Recently Harvard, which charges an actual-cost average of \$36,115 per year to undergraduates, said it would charge nothing at all to children from households earning less than \$50,000 a year. Other elite schools are making similar pledges, while Princeton recently converted all financial-aid loans into grants (discounts), making college more affordable for average families. These are good developments. My question: Why does *anyone* pay to attend Harvard? At the end of fiscal 2006, Harvard's endowment, richest in education, hit \$29 billion, which exceeds the gross domestic product of Costa Rica. Federal law requires that endowments and philanthropies give away at minimum 5 percent per year, so the Harvard endowment must release to Harvard at least \$1.5 billion through the current fiscal cycle. *That's \$79,000 per student*, combining undergrads and graduates. Swarthmore College recently told the New York Times its full annual spending (payments for attendance, plus endowment and foundation income) is \$73,000 per student. Harvard has higher expenses than Swarthmore because it operates research-center facilities and a medical school, but Harvard also receives many millions of dollars annually in federal research and medical funding that Swarthmore and similar liberal-arts colleges don't receive. So if the Harvard endowment will throw off more per student this year than Swarthmore spends in total per student, why is Harvard charging anything to attend? Harvard asserts its expenses this academic year [will be \\$3 billion](#), which works out to \$158,000 per student. That's the expense Harvard claims per student *per year*, not per four-year degree. One wonders where all this money is actually going.

College names note: Stanford is often called the Harvard of the West, Davidson is widely known as the Harvard of the South. Why doesn't someone found a new university and actually name it The Harvard of the West?

**NFLN Update:** Maybe the football gods don't want Thursday night games! Startup NFL Network has now broadcast four Thursday night contests, and 15 of the 16 quarters have been among the league's most sleep-inducing of the season. Only the final quarter of San Francisco at Seattle was interesting, and my guess is even those households that get NFLN switched off when Niners-Hawks was a lively 7-3 at the end of the third.

Diehards who stuck around beheld the dénouement of one of the worst displays of overconfidence in pro sports history. Seattle entered the contest as a heavy favorite over San Francisco and expected to clinch the NFC West before its noisy home crowd. But the Blue Men Group started acting like they'd already won when they did not even hold a secure lead. Game scoreless, Seattle punted from the San Francisco 43. Leading 7-0, Seattle punted from the San Francisco 40 and then later punted from the San Francisco 36, as if there were no need to press the case and score more. Three punts in opposition territory in a single half! The Seahawks should have moved aggressively to knock the Niners down. Instead Seattle kept passively punting in the maroon zone, and the Squared Sevens hung around. Now suddenly it's San Francisco 10, Seattle 7 early in the fourth quarter. The home team had third-and-1 on the visitor's 27 and was stuffed on two straight runs -- though the Niners' defense allows an average of 4.2 yards per carry. The Seattle offensive line, among the league's best in 2005, barely seemed to lean against the Niners' front on both these embarrassing plays. To top it off -- well, see below.

As recently as a few years ago, TMQ drummed on the immutable law, cold coach equals victory. I gave numerous examples of how, in bad-weather games, the coach who overdressed in a ridiculous K2 mountaineering parka inevitably was defeated by the coach in a varsity jacket or light coat. My

arguments were so persuasive that NFL coaches have since almost entirely shunned super-heavy winter wear: Tuesday Morning Quarterback might not have made a dent in the obsession with punting when behind, but I've convinced the pro football world that cheerleaders shedding attire and coaches shunning heavy coats are keys to victory. In the San Francisco at Seattle contest, however, Mike Holmgren committed what's now a relatively rare violation of TMQ's law of cold coaches. Kickoff temperature 52 degrees with rain and light wind, Nolan the Younger trotted onto the Niners' sideline wearing varsity jacket and baseball cap. Holmgren came out in what appeared to be a North Sea oil-rig workers' survival suit -- heavy parka, heavy insulated pants, outsized hood pulled over his head. Mike, it was 52 degrees! (The Pacific Northwest storm of last week did not reach Seattle until after midnight.) As the broadcast began and I saw what the coaches were wearing, I said, "The Niners can win this."

**Law of the Other Shoe:** TMQ's immutable Law of the Other Shoe holds that when something goes badly wrong on one play, usually involving a turnover or change of possession, something often goes badly wrong on the next play too, especially if the defense has unexpectedly come onto the field. San Diego leading 7-3, Kansas City blocked a punt; a Chief touched the ball beyond the line of scrimmage, a Bolt fell on the ball. Officials initially ruled it Kansas City ball on the San Diego 15, thinking a blocked punt must belong to the receiving team. But a scrimmage kick touched by the receivers beyond the line of scrimmage is a live ball; zebras corrected the ruling and gave San Diego first down on its 15. The Chargers had benefited from having their punt blocked! Kansas City's dispirited defense failed to take into account the Law of the Other Shoe -- on the next snap, LaDainian Tomlinson ran 85 yards for a touchdown.

**Jax Agonistes:** Favored Jacksonville staged an epic meltdown at Tennessee, allowing a 92-yard fumble return touchdown and interception return touchdowns of 83 and 61 yards. You don't see many games in which a team outgains its opponent by 298 offensive yards and 18 first downs, holds the opponent's offense to a field goal, and loses. But return yards count just as much as offensive yards, and when you factor in return yards, Jacksonville gained 521 total yards to Tennessee's 468 total yards, which spells a close game, exactly what the final score showed. What's really infuriating about those three long Flaming Thumbtacks' returns is that because they were so long, they came with the Jags positioned to score. Jacksonville turned the ball over from the Tennessee 16, 27 and 47. Two of David Garrard's turnovers were cover-your-eyes awful -- a careless fumble on the Titans' 16 when just getting on the ground likely would have been followed by a field goal and a Jax lead, a crazy interception heave-hoed into coverage when the Jaguars were only down by seven points with a quarter to go. Jax has now beaten Dallas, Indianapolis, both Jerseys, Philadelphia and Pittsburgh while honking to Houston twice and to Tennessee. The Jaguars' defense is third-best in points allowed, the Jaguars' offense is second-best in rushing -- how can this team overall still be so unimposing? This team just does not pay attention, and lack of focus starts at the top.

Note: Everyone raced to the stat sheets to check Tennessee's return yards. A long-standing TMQ complaint is the nutty record-keeping of the NFL's official game books. [Check the game book](#) for this contest. In the game totals, one subject area is headed, "total return yardage (not including kickoffs)." Huh? So then it's not the total. But even if you add kickoff yardage, you still don't get the total -- you must go separately to the "fumbles" heading and see if any fumble return yards are noted. Why doesn't the "total return yardage" stat line simply list total return yardage?

**Two Out of Three Ain't Bad:** "It's a touchdown!" I sometimes proclaim this when I see a quarterback confidently plant his feet and confidently launch a deep pass. I figure the quarterback's confident body language means he sees an open receiver deep. Jason Campbell of the Redskins and Kyle Boller of the Ravens both hit deep touchdown passes Sunday on plays on which they

confidently planted and confidently threw, causing your columnist to say "It's a touchdown!" as the ball took flight. On the other hand, in the fourth quarter Drew Brees confidently planted and confidently threw an interception directly to Carlos Rogers of Washington.

**Wacky Margarita Watch:** Reader Miles Pittman notes the New York Times food section recently ran the below recipe for a horseradish pomegranate margarita:

1/3 cup fresh horseradish, peeled and chopped

1 cup silver (blanco) tequila

½ ounce Cointreau

¾ ounce fresh lime juice

½ ounce pomegranate juice

¼ ounce simple syrup.

1. In a bowl mix horseradish with tequila and let mixture sit for 24 hours. Strain through cheesecloth.

2. Pour 1½ ounces horseradish-infused tequila and all other ingredients into a cocktail shaker. Fill shaker with ice and shake it vigorously for 6 seconds. Add ice cubes to an old-fashioned glass and pour drink over them.

The Times left out the final step -- "Pour mixture down drain."

**The Football Gods Promised an Investigation:** Speaking of football on television, I don't think there's been enough of it! Bad enough that MAC, Conference USA and Mountain West games were conspicuously absent from their accustomed Tuesday and Wednesday night positions on ESPN this autumn. Worse, December has arrived, and *there are days and times with no nationally telecast football game at all*. This is America, how could this happen? On Dec. 5, 6, 12, 13 and 20, no nationally televised pro or college football games air. On Dec. 9 there was no televised primetime football game, while on the evenings of Dec. 8 and 15 and on Saturday afternoons of Dec. 9 and 16, only small-college football was broadcast. What's going on here? With 500 channels and universal football mania, we actually need more football on television.

**Buck-Buck-Brawckkkkkkk:** Trailing Buffalo 21-0, Miami faced fourth-and-6 on its 41 with eight minutes remaining. That can't be a punt! Trailing 21-0, Miami faced fourth-and-4 on its 33 with four minutes remaining. That can't be a punt! When it was fourth-and-5 with a minute remaining and it did not matter in the slightest whether the Dolphins kicked, tried for the first down or started square dancing, *then* Miami went for it.

**The Bears Are 12-2, Have Clinched Home-Field -- and Are Making Excuses:** "Tim Rattay got all his passing yards after the Bucs had already lost the game," said Jimmy Johnson at 4:09 p.m. ET on the Fox postgame show, when it was Chicago 31, Tampa 17. At 4:22 p.m. ET, Rattay threw another touchdown pass to force overtime. So the announcers thought the contest was over when the Bears went ahead 24-3 late in the third quarter. More important, the Bears thought the game was over. Often defenses relax when the backup quarterback enters the contest: Chicago relaxed to the tune of 268 yards passing and three touchdown passes allowed to Tim Rattay, who hadn't thrown for a touchdown since September 2005. The stars of the Buccaneers' almost-comeback were Rattay, Ike Hilliard and Joey Galloway -- all retreats. And blah blah blah, we've got injuries. Blah blah blah, we've got players in legal trouble. In the NFL *everybody* has injuries and, this season, practically everybody has players in legal trouble. If you have Super Bowl ambitions, your defense better be able to hold a 21-point second half lead against a losing team.

**A Few Cosmic Thoughts:** Complex animals, including the first vertebrates, seem to have appeared on Earth around 540 million years ago. This period is known to that paleontologists as the Cambrian Explosion, because animals went from unknown to common in a short time by geological standards. At least that's how it seemed, since no fossils of complex animals older than about 540 million years had been found. Was this because there were no older complex animals, or because they lacked the kind of hard bone structures that leave fossils? Recently a team of researchers at Nanjing University in China found in Precambrian rocks evidence of animals similar to mollusks that lived 600 million years ago. Animals have roamed our world for *600 million years*. Every time the tools of astronomy improve, the universe is shown to be larger -- and every time the tools of paleontology improve, life is shown to be older. Meanwhile in Dong Xa in Vietnam, Peter Bellwood and Judith Cameron of Australia National University recently found the ruins of a log boat identical to a distinctive design that dates to Rome during the reign of Caligula. Coins and other artifacts found with the boat date to the same period. Could the Romans have gotten as far as Vietnam? Every time the tools of archeology improve, the human past becomes more tantalizing.

**As We Read in the Third Epistle to the Corinthians, the Apostle Said, "Verily, Take Ye a Tree, and Place Onto It Baubles and Little Electric Lights from CVS ...":** Last week Sea-Tac International Airport in Seattle briefly removed, then returned to place, all Christmas trees after being threatened with a lawsuit asserting display of the trees without symbols of other faiths [violated separation of church and state](#). (Sea-Tac is publicly owned.) This raises a common misconception that drives TMQ crazy at this time of year -- Christmas trees are not religious symbols! Yes, you put them up at Christmas time. But ornaments on trees, Santa in the chimney, flying reindeer, chuckling elves, stockings by the fire: good luck finding these things in the Bible! (Though several generally accepted translations contain references to unicorns.) Santa is vaguely based on Saint Nicholas, a third-century Greek bishop renowned for his love of giving presents; the Christmas tree probably descends from the 16th century German custom of trimming a tree to celebrate New Year's. Even so, trees and stockings are no more part of Christian theology regarding Christmas than latkes and dreidels are part of Judaic theology about Hanukkah -- all are communal traditions with their antecedents in sociology, not religious belief. Modern observation of Christmas involves two simultaneous events: religious commemoration of the birth story of Jesus and an entirely secular festival of gift-giving centered on a pleasing children's fable about a kindly bearded sorcerer who loves little boys and girls and leaves them presents while they sleep. Airport Christmas trees and similar decorations have nothing to do with religion, everything to do with materialism. Even in modern churches, at this point Christmas celebration is 99 percent secular, 1 percent religious. This does not sit well with some Christians, including me. Be that as it may, Christmas trees and Santa Claus are not religious symbols! Unless for the church of the National Association of Manufacturers.

**It's Fun to Play Downhill:** Owing to two Texans' interceptions, a failed fake punt and two short punts, plus a penalty, in the first half New England took possession on the Houston 24, 31, 34, 42 and 44.

**The Ravens Are So Good They Made Kyle Boller Look Good on Sunday:** Baltimore leads the league in turnover differential and is second in sacks differential -- the Ravens continue to be a team you don't want to play. Yet they struggled at home against Cleveland's backup quarterback, not pulling away until late. Fun play that never happened: Trailing 27-17, Cleveland was on its 24 at the two-minute warning. Backup quarterback Derek Anderson was hemmed in, and lateraled to tight end Kellen Winslow, who had been blocking. Winslow was attempting to launch a pass downfield when the Ravens sacked him.

**Trust Us, We're Experts:** Sports Illustrated predicted Carolina and Miami would meet in the Super Bowl. The Dolphins are eliminated and the Panthers are 6-8.

**Over the Moon:** As NASA declares that people will return to the moon, TMQ wonders -- by what right can astronauts land there? That is, are we trespassing? A 1967 treaty, signed by the United States and most nations, prohibits claims of national sovereignty on the moon. Richard Steiner, a professor at University of Alaska, has proposed that the United Nations designate the moon a World Heritage Site, which would rule out development on the lunar surface: Explorers could land, but Burger King would be out, and perhaps even NASA moon bases would be proscribed. The trouble is that the World Heritage Convention, ratified by United States in 1973, specifically says it protects heritage sites "on Earth." A Six Rings Over Saturn theme park would be OK as far as the United Nations is concerned! Steiner also has asked the National Parks Service to prohibit development on the moon; whether the National Parks Service has jurisdiction over other worlds is unclear.

On the flip side the [Moon Society](#), devoted to lunar issues not college pranks, wants legislation and treaties making it clear that "large scale industrialization and private enterprise" would be legal on the moon. A Japanese firm called Shimizu Construction has done a design study on a lunar resort. The study skipped the astonishing cost of reaching the moon -- \$50 million per ton landed on the moon is an optimistic goal for the new NASA program -- and simply asked what a lunar resort might be like for guests. (Answer: They would sit in extremely cramped metallic pods looking out the window and eating granola bars.) Because the cost of sending even tiny capsules to the moon is absurdly high, TMQ considers lunar land-use questions moot until such times as there might be a fundamental breakthrough in propulsion.

**This Fulfills My Obligation to Say Something About the Rams-Raiders Game:** Punter Matt Turk's stat line was significantly padded by a 74-yard punt. A magnificent kick? St. Louis was kicking from its 19 with 17 seconds remaining in the first half, Oakland out of timeouts. The Raiders rushed everyone, hoping for a blocked kick; Turk's punt boomed and then rolled, rolled, rolled. Note: Oakland has been shut out three times, including twice at home.

**TMQ's Christmas List:** How about this charming *powered* [paper towel dispenser](#). It's so exhausting and draining to pull a paper towel off the roll, battery power is needed. Or how about a Kaz brand [heating pad](#). They're stamped with a capital-letters 125-word warning statement, including the caution, DO NOT USE IN OXYGEN ATMOSPHERE. Like, on another planet? (Sometimes physicians order nearly pure oxygen delivered through a facemask, but it's hard to imagine getting the heating pad under the facemask, while "oxygen tents" are employed only for infants.)

Christmas note: The airways are awash with ads for the latest big-screen flat-panel televisions from Samsung, Sony and others. This raises the Advertising Televisions on Television paradox. All ads tout the "incredible clarity" and "magnificent pictures" and "striking colors" of the latest sets. But if you're watching on an outdated set, you cannot possibly see the incredible clarity or striking colors. And if you can see the magnificent picture, then you don't need a new television! This is especially nutty when ads boast of the astonishing features of new High Definition sets. The only way you can appreciate the astonishing features of High Definition is to watch on an HD system -- in which case you've already got one.

**At Happy Hour in Hell's Sports Bar, They're Playing Kenny G Christmas Music:** Hell's sports bar has 28 wide-screen plasma TVs, and on Sunday all were showing the Rams at Raiders game. For the highlight program, all 28 screens in Hell's Sports Bar showed nothing but, over and over, Detroit facing fourth-and-26 from its own 1.

**Pro Bowl Note:** Today the NFL announces the 88 Percent All-Stars: the gentlemen who have been chosen for the Pro Bowl despite the fact that two games remain. Shouldn't the Pro Bowl be a distinction for those who play well all season, not just in the first 14 games? Two weeks from now when the regular season has concluded, Tuesday Morning Quarterback announces his annual All-Unwanted All-Pros squad -- the NFL's best players who were never drafted, or were let go, or both.

**Rookie of the Year Note:** The sports-yak world is debating whether the Rookie of the Year should be Vince Young, Reggie Bush, Devin Hester or Marques Colston -- all glory boys. Ninety percent of the action in football happens away from the ball. No rookie has had a better combination of good play and positive impact on his team than defensive tackle Haloti Ngata of Baltimore. He's not a ball carrier. But why isn't he in the Rookie of the Year mix?

**The NCAA Does Not Yet Actually Brand Players, But It's Under Consideration:** Though the NCAA periodically insists it does not care about money -- neither does Katie Holmes -- the NCAA also boasts of being a brand. Its registered trademarks not only include Final Four but Campus Corner, The Big Dance, The Road Ends Here and the puzzling, "All Day. Every Day. Our Game." Since the NCAA is into cute wording, note the mission-statement declaration on its branding page: "Learning. Balance. Spirit. Community. Fair play. Character. These are the attributes that the NCAA promotes through its branding initiative." Missing word? Education. "Learning" doesn't necessarily mean academic education -- it could mean getting better at sports.

**The Football Gods Chortled:** When bumbling coach Mike Mularkey quit the Bills last winter and went to Miami as offensive coordinator, Neil Easterbrook, an Official Brother of TMQ and a diehard Bills' fan, immediately pronounced: "This is great, now Mularkey will coach against Buffalo twice a year and do just as bad for the Dolphins as he did for us." And yea, verily, it came to pass. The Bills swept the Dolphins this season and outscored them 37-6, the sole Miami touchdown coming with a minute remaining in a rout. Hey, Wayne Huizenga -- don't ever fire Mike Mularkey!

**Sominex Bids to Sponsor Upcoming Jets-Raiders Game:** The Jets are quietly 8-6 and stand a decent chance at the playoffs in the first season of Eric "I Was a Teenaged Coach" Mangini. Why aren't they generating excitement? I think the reason is their look. Jersey/B explicably continues to play in 1847 throwback uniforms plus black shoes -- the antiquated unis and black shoes make the Jets appear to be the slowest-looking team in the NFL. The Jets' appearance projects monotony; maybe this is what Mangini wants. Their game plan projects monotony -- underneath, underneath, underneath. Maybe that's what Mangini wants, too. How could an opponent get psyched up for playing the Jets? Maybe that's what Mangini wants.

As for Minnesota, the Vikings have one of the league's most expensive offensive lines with megabucks starters Steve Hutchinson, Bryant McKinnie and Matt Birk, plus a highly paid blocking tight end in Jim Kleinsasser, yet Sunday provided little pass protection to Minnesota's quarterbacks. It seemed clear as Minnesota wheezed out before its home crowd that Vikes players have quit on the season. Novice head coach Mice Tice coddled the Vikings, and was replaced by novice head coach Brad Childress, who has coddled the Vikings. For many years running, Minnesota players have been paid extremely well for scant performance, while getting away with whatever they please off the field. The record won't change until that changes.

**Single Worst Play of the Season So Far:** San Francisco had rallied to lead the heavily favored Seahawks 17-7, and now faced third-and-8 on the Seattle 18 with 1:49 remaining. The home team's sole hope of pulling out victory rested on a stop. Alex Smith faked a handoff up the middle, then bootlegged left -- and basically walked to the end zone as Seattle defenders stood around, hands on

hips, doing nothing whatsoever. For the last 15 yards, Smith was waving the ball in the air and jogging because *no Seattle defender bothered to chase him*. Linebacker Lofa Tatupu jogged in Smith's general direction as the quarterback scored; no other Seattle defenders, including its speed defensive backs, could be bothered moving. To top it off, Smith had retreated all the way to the Seattle 27 on his bootleg fake -- there was plenty of time to catch him, and none of the highly overpaid Seahawks so much as tried. Seattle Seahawks defense, you are guilty of TMQ's Single Worst Play of the Season So Far.

**Obscure College Score of the Week No. 1:** Appalachian State 28, Massachusetts 17 (Division I-AA championship). Located in Boone, N.C., Appalachian State University has a formal business relationship with a [highway](#).

**Obscure College Score of the Week:** Grand Valley State 17, Northwest Missouri State 14 (Division II championship). Located in Allendale, Mich., Grand Valley State has a [hospitality-industry major](#) whose electives include "HTM 175, International Food and Culture. An exploration of world cultures via an examination of foods." A college course about eating!

**Obscure College Score of the Week:** Mount Union 35, Wisconsin-Whitewater 16 (Division III championship). Located in Alliance, Ohio, Mount Union College posts online the floor plans of its largest women's [residence hall](#). TMQ suspects many male Mount Union students have found these schema useful for sneaking in or sneaking out after midnight.

Obscure College note: With the subdivision title games concluded, the stadium lights have been turned off at the nation's little schools. Obscure College Score of the Week falls silent till that happy day in late August when the stadium lights come back on again. TMQ finds it reassuring that long after you and I have departed this mortal coil and are trying to scalp tickets to meet the football gods, every Saturday all across the nation, plastic-clad combatants will be slamming into each other as autumn leaves fall, guys try to get girls' cell numbers and car alarms go off in the parking lot.

**Reader Animadversion:** Got a complaint or a deeply held grievance? Write me at [TMQ\\_ESPN@yahoo.com](mailto:TMQ_ESPN@yahoo.com). Include your real name and the name of your hometown, and I may quote you by name unless you instruct me otherwise. Note: giving your hometown improves your odds of being quoted.

**Next Week:** Nothing next week -- the column resumes on Jan. 2. Maneuver your heartthrob under the mistletoe and kiss her or him once for me. Wait, that didn't come out right.

**Wednesday, December 20, 2006**

TMQ Nation fires back

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By Gregg Easterbrook

A large number of readers including **Jeremy Burke of New Orleans** protested that one of my stats – "the NFC South is on a combined 0-10 streak" – could not be correct because the Saints beat the Cowboys a week ago. A team's streak is what has happened consecutively, and right now the Saints' streak is "lost one." [See the streak headings here](#). I further said of the Saints that they lost at home because their cheerleaders failed to appease the football gods by wearing naughty elf outfits. Many readers including **Ava Jacobsen of Frankfort, Ky.** pointed out the Indianapolis Colts' cheerleaders dressed as very naughty elves on "Monday Night Football," and the Colts cruised to victory.

Tuesday Morning Quarterback now has a Boss Button that eliminates the photos of cheer-babes in elf outfits and the 10,000-amp yellow background, allowing surreptitious TMQ reading at the office. **John Bauer of State College, Penn.** protests that when you switch to Boss Button view, the screen still displays a huge red Boss Button! Now John, do you really think America's management class is smart enough to figure out that clue?

In the bad sportsmanship category, **Clint Scroggs of Canton, Ohio** reports, "In the Ohio high school football Division 6 regional semifinals, Shadyside ran up the score to beat Beallsville 71-0. As big of a juggernaut as I knew Shadyside to be, I was confident that score would not be ignored by the football gods. In the state finals at Canton's Fawcett Stadium, the result was Maria Stein Marion 17, Shadyside 0." In the good sportsmanship category, **Carl Grunewald of Platteville, Wis.** notes, "Recently the Arizona State women's basketball team was set to play Rutgers in the championship of a tournament when a family member of an ASU player died unexpectedly. The game was canceled with neither team taking the loss, though Rutgers could have required ASU to forfeit. Rutgers deserves credit for showing such sportsmanship – they passed up a free W and did the right thing."

TMQ disputed gender-confused college nicknames such as Lady Statesmen or the South Carolina women's teams being Gamecocks. **Jessica Collins of Myrtle Beach, S.C.** writes, "College mascots do not represent athletes as much as they do schools, and in the case of the University of South Carolina, the Gamecock references a state hero from the Revolutionary War era, Thomas Sumter. His nickname was the Gamecock because of his toughness. Yes, Sumter was a man. But if this means the women's teams at SCAR (the "crawl" abbreviation ESPN gives us) are still gender confused, you should mention other prominent schools are also gender confused, or genderless. How about the Longhorns or the Buckeyes?" Longhorns are a breed of cattle, and cattle can be either male or female. So having the Texas women's teams be Longhorns seems fine – as long as you don't mind being named after a cow. The buckeye is a flowering tree that reproduces androgynously, which does raise all kinds of questions about Ohio State athletes of both genders. **Mike Moser of Milwaukee** writes, "I attended a Catholic high school in Wisconsin named Pius XI High. Our sports teams were the Popes. It was decidedly impossible to be a frightening Pope – unless we're talking Inquisition-era Popes, which Pius XI wasn't. Even more difficult was the case for the girls' basketball team, which had to be the Lady Popes."

**Sunil Deshpande of Atlanta** reports that when he traveled recently to Mumbai, India, leaving the United States made him eligible to purchase NFL Game Pass and watch any NFL game on the Internet. Tuesday Morning Quarterback continues to ask – why is viewing access to NFL games

much better for those outside the United States than for the people inside the United States, whose taxes funded the stadiums that make NFL profits possible?

**Will Greendyke of San Antonio** wrote, "As an alum of Davidson College, I am flattered that you lauded my alma mater. However, I must contend that Davidson does not refer to itself as the Harvard of the South, rather as the Princeton of the South, because the two schools share historical ties both to Woodrow Wilson and to the Presbyterian church. Count me among those who refer to Princeton as the Davidson of the North."

TMQ's favorite obscure school, Indiana of Pennsylvania, [has chosen Crimson Hawks](#) as its new sports nickname. **Alice Rudolph of Wilmette, Ill.** writes that IUP may not be aware Crimson Hawk is also the name of an online comic book featuring a highly oversexed heroine. I can't link to the Crimson Hawk comic, but I'm betting it won't take you long to find it.

Readers including **Amy Lisler of Golden, Colo.** noted that one playoff hypothetical from Tuesday's column cannot happen – San Francisco cannot finish 8-8, win the NFC West and receive a home playoff game while Denver finishes 10-6 and opens the postseason on the road. This can't happen, she notes, because the Broncos and Niners face each other in the season finale. If Denver finishes 10-6, San Francisco's best finish is 7-9, and in that case Seattle is assured of winning the division. Amy also asked why I said Denver has already been mathematically eliminated from "opening" the playoffs at home – if the Broncos don't open at home, aren't they eliminated from any postseason date at home? Not necessarily. Denver's best potential seeding is fifth. The fifth seed must play on the road in the wild-card round, and if successful, in the divisional round. A fifth seed that wins its first two playoff contests could host a conference championship game if the opponent is the sixth seed. So though Denver cannot open the postseason at home, mathematically the Broncos remain alive for a home playoff game. It's unlikely, however – the fifth and sixth seeds have never met for a conference championship.

I asked for examples of television networks running ads for shows on competing networks, observing that you can't switch to the advertised show without first switching off the network you're watching. Many readers sent hilarious examples of networks accepting each other's ads. Sadly, in the Yahoo! e-mail beta breakdown of two weeks ago, much of the TMQ mailbox was wiped out, including the examples I'd been saving for an item on this, plus various other messages. If you've recently grumbled to yourself, "I sent Easterbrook a really clever Reader Animadversion and he never quoted it," this is why. Anyway here's an example I caught this week. NFL Network ran an ad for the Anderson Cooper show on CNN, and you can't switch to "360" without first switching off "Total Access." The amusing backstory is that CNN is owned by Time Warner – which is leading the cable carriers' fight to keep NFL Network off basic cable.

TMQ mentioned Cynar, the bitter liquor based on artichokes. **Matt Heimer of Brooklyn, N.Y.** reports, "In the mid-1990s, I dated a woman whose parents were medical doctors and Dutch expatriates. When entertaining, the good doctors served tumblers of Cynar before every meal, claiming artichokes contain an enzyme that cleans the tongue, thereby making your taste buds more sensitive and improving the experience of whatever you subsequently eat. Sure enough, the meals tasted pretty good. But I couldn't help thinking: Wouldn't *anything* taste better compared to a glass of artichoke-based bitters? [Here's a link](#) in which 'an expert on the psychology of taste' talks about the virtues of artichokes."

**Alan Goldhammer of Bethesda, Md.** writes, "You said the University of Michigan pioneered the Monster Man defense. You got the territory correct but the school wrong – it was Michigan State.

The two Monster Men that I remember well were George Webster and Brad Van Pelt. As you know, both went on to NFL careers as linebackers."

**Matt Saunders of Seattle** objected to my saying that the Northwest storm of last week did not hit until after midnight on the night of the Niners-Seahawks game. I should have made clear I meant midnight Eastern, where I watched; the game ended at 8:29 local time. He writes, "As a resident of the Emerald City, I can confirm storm winds were blowing well before midnight on Thursday, December 14. Check the [weather history](#) for that night for Boeing Field, which is four miles south of Qwest Field. Wind was at a sustained 20 MPH by kickoff, and rose to almost 30 MPH while the game progressed. As Bryant Gumbel signed off, he said something to the effect of 'Goodnight from Seattle, where the storms never materialized.' As he said this I looked outside, and gusting winds were blowing the rain sideways!"

Regarding my item on the paradox of advertising fancy TVs on TV – if you've got an old television you can't appreciate the fancy image, and if you can appreciate the fancy new model, then you don't need a new television – **Rabbi Daniel Plotkin of St. Louis** writes, "I'll have to buy an HDTV just so that I can enjoy the commercials for HDTV." He adds, "It's bad enough to spend two months explaining that Christmas and Chanukah have nothing to do with each other, now next Monday all the places I like to go or eat will be closed, and following that, no TMQ next Tuesday! It is too much for one man to bear."

I said Christmas trees are not religious symbols – ornamented firs, Santa, chuckling elves and so on come from popular culture, not scripture. Nativity scenes are explicitly religious and don't belong at town halls or in city parks or at any government or public facility – but where's the harm, I wondered, in a lighted tree? Many readers countered that because Christmas trees denote in people's minds a Christian religious event, the Establishment Clause dictates they should not be on public property. **Aaron Venar of Seattle** wrote, "The Christmas tree is a religious symbol in the 'if it walks like a duck' sense. While those outside the fold recognize that Santa and the tree are not themselves religious, don't blame us for feeling they are intimately tied to Christmas and serve as billboards for Christianity." **Aaron Kleinman of Charlottesville, Va.** counters, "Perception is reality, and a Christmas tree is a symbol of a Christian religious holiday. Its lack of relationship to scripture is moot; when the tree is in a public place, it represents government endorsement of one religious view as opposed to another. That said, I'm all in favor of your Spendmas idea since I'd love to segregate fun things like Christmas trees, Santa Claus and Christmas cookies from anything that deals with public celebration of the birth of Christ."

Aaron, thanks for reminding me of Spendmas. A couple years ago, TMQ proposed that the December 25th event be split into two separate holidays: Christmas, a religious commemoration of the birth story of Jesus, and Spendmas, an entirely secular festival of gift-giving incorporating bright lights, Santa, elves and credit-card debt. Separating Christmas and Spendmas would resolve all the First Amendment issues. Merry Spendmas!

**Monday, January 1, 2007**

**Updated: January 2, 1:51 PM ET**

Playoffs are here, no excuses

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By Gregg Easterbrook

Now that the regular season is over, it's time to start lining up excuses. The excuse Tuesday Morning Quarterback does not want to hear is, "We had a lot of close losses." *Everybody* in the National Football League has a lot of close losses!

On the final weekend, Denver honked out of the playoffs by a field goal, Jacksonville honked out by five points, Cincinnati honked by six points, Dallas honked the NFC East crown by eight points. Down the home stretch, Cincinnati lost by an extra point, then lost in overtime. Down the home stretch, Jax lost by a field goal, then by a touchdown, then by less than a touchdown. San Francisco was eliminated by a six-point defeat, Atlanta was eliminated by a seven-point defeat. Buffalo would have made the playoffs had it not lost twice by a single point. Carolina had three field-goal losses; change one, and the Cats would have been in.

In 2005, 45 percent of NFL games were won by a margin of a touchdown or less; 23 percent were won by a margin of a field goal or less. (I don't have the 2006 stats yet but assume it is similar; the 2005 figures are typical for the past decade.) Houston was the league's worst team in 2005, and six of its losses were by a touchdown or less. Oakland was the league's worst team in 2006, and five of its losses were by a touchdown or less. Cleveland was awful this season at 4-12; change the outcomes of the four games the Browns lost by a touchdown or less, and Cleveland would have been a playoff contender. Arizona was the butt of jokes in 2005, and again in 2006; in both seasons, the Cardinals lost five games by a touchdown or less. So teams that will be sitting on the couch this month watching the playoffs on television and seeing the head coach's neck veins fairly popping out of his skin in HD -- don't use "We lost a lot of close games" as an excuse. You know how many NFL teams had a lot of close losses this year? All of them did!

In terrible news, the murder of Broncos' cornerback Darrent Williams makes everything that happened in the Denver season pale in comparison. Some thoughts on the loss of this young man are below. For now, the lesser questions of Denver football -- in this case, why didn't the Broncos play for the tie? Last season, Atlanta knocked itself out of the postseason by playing to win in an overtime, when a tie would have kept the Falcons in contention. Sunday, it was Denver and San Francisco knotted at 23 points in overtime, the Broncos having first-and-10 on their 22 with 5:38 remaining. A tie puts Denver in the playoffs -- so play for a tie! There are 78 yards in front of the home team, whose crowd is roaring at jet-fighter-afterburner decibels. Seventy-eight yards is plenty of room in which to kill 5:38, play for a tie! At that point, the only way Denver could have failed to gain the postseason was by giving the ball back to San Francisco with some time left on the clock. How did the Broncos play it? Short pass, incompleteness, incompleteness, punt. Not only did Denver fail to seek a tie, it stopped the clock twice. You know what happened next.

In other news, TMQ loves Tiki Barber, whom this column calls TTNY -- The Toast of New York -- and was glad to see his rip-roaring 234-yard performance in what perhaps was his final regular-season outing. But you can't help feeling Barber's two months of retirement talk have been a factor in the Giants' swoon. Jersey/A was 6-2 when Barber started giving nonstop interviews about his plan to retire, shifting the focus away from the team and onto himself. For his perhaps-final home game on Christmas Eve, Barber was introduced last, and came out with his family at his side. This

shifted the focus away from the team and on to one player. There are some sports, prominently basketball, where an individual performance can determine victory. But football success is possible only if everyone thinks and acts as a team. Barber's nonstop retirement talk shifted the Giants' focus away from the team and on to its individual personalities and, as we found out, many of the Giants' individual personalities are not all that attractive. Barber started it by shining the spotlight on his own face and, much as TMQ loves the guy, Tiki might have triggered the Giants' swoon.

In other news, the Seahawks can relax -- the Cincinnati Bengals have now taken the mantle of TMQ's Single Worst Play of the Season So Far. See below. And in other football news, can there actually be a limit to Americans' interest in watching football on television? That had certainly never occurred to me, and it seems not to have occurred to the National Football League, either. See analysis of the floundering NFL Network below.

Finally, the AFC postseason entrants were a combined 21-3 versus the NFC. The NFC postseason entrants were a combined 10-14 versus the AFC. Anybody care to guess which conference will win the Super Bowl?

**Stat of the Week No. 1:** Contenders Atlanta, Cincinnati, Denver and Jacksonville finished on a combined 2-14 run.

**Stat of the Week No. 2:** The Giants and Seahawks made the playoffs despite being outscored.

**Stat of the Week No. 3:** Jon Kitna took every offensive snap of the season at quarterback for the Lions.

**Stat of the Week No. 4:** Oakland's offense scored 12 touchdowns and committed 46 turnovers.

**Stat of the Week No. 5:** Buffalo, Green Bay, San Francisco and Tennessee opened a combined 5-19 and closed a combined 25-15.

**Stat of the Week No. 6:** Cleveland finished with 16 players on the injured list.

**Stat of the Week No. 7:** Marvin Lewis is 8-10 in December as a head coach.

**Stat of the Week No. 8:** Dick Jauron is 1-5 in terms of winning seasons as an NFL head coach.

**Stat of the Week No. 9:** Tony Dungy and Marty Schottenheimer are a combined 314-188 in the regular season and a combined 10-20 in the postseason.

**Cheerleader of the Week** Michael Fitzgerald of Littleton, Colo. nominates [Chelsea](#) of the Washington Redskins Cheerleaders, a student at George Mason University. According to her team bio, Chelsea had to stop cheering for a year because she tore her ACL. That must give her empathy with the Redskins' locker room!



Just like half the Redskins' players, she's got a zipper. (Knee injury.)

**Sweet Play of the Week No. 1:** With LaDainian Tomlinson and Philip Rivers on the sideline resting, things were getting a little sweaty for San Diego, which led Arizona 27-20 at the two-minute warning and faced second-and-2 on its 31. The Bolts needed to win to clinch the first seed, and Schottenheimer did not want to send his stars back into the back. The call was up the middle to blocking back Lorenzo Neal, who almost never carries -- 10 touches in 15 games to that point. Neal rumbled 43 yards, and the rest was kneel-downs. Coming into the game, Neal had 27 yards rushing on the season; on his last carry of 2006 he more than doubled his season output.

**Sweet Play of the Week No. 2:** San Francisco leading heavily favored Denver 17-16, Alex Smith looked left, pumped left, kept looking left -- then snapped back right and threw for 35 yards to Arnaz Battle, setting up a Niners' field goal. On that play Smith gave the appearance of being a first-overall draft pick.

**Sweet Tactic of the Week:** It's hard to figure out the pattern if there is no pattern! This season, Miami got good results by letting Jason Taylor line up wherever he wanted. Sometimes, offensive coordinators tell the motion man to move randomly -- go wherever he feels like -- so long as he ends up in the correct spot by the snap. Sunday, Mike Martz let all the Detroit "skill" players move randomly before setting for the snap. The result was delightful chaos. On one play, quarterback Jon Kitna lined up wide, then ran back to be under center for the snap; this wasn't planned, Kitna did it spontaneously. The Lions rung up 39 points with this tactic and you could almost see Cowboys defenders thinking, "How come we can't figure out the pattern of these shifts?" Note: Midseason, sportsradio and Dallas players were boasting about the Cowboys' defense. Dallas lost its last three home games, surrendering 104 points.

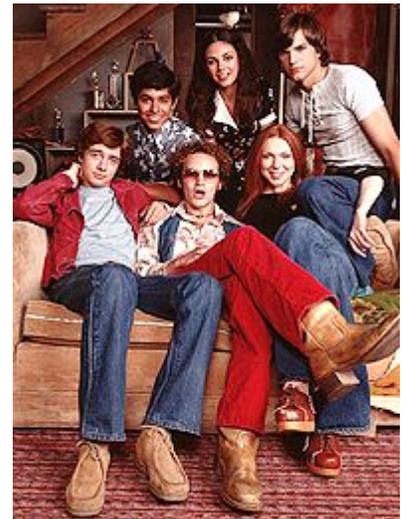
**Sweet Sequence of the Week:** Leading 10-7, the Seahawks had second-and-18 on the City of Tampa 32 late in the first half. Matt Hasselbeck threw an apparent touchdown to D.J. Hackett, but the completion was reversed. The next snap was third-and-18, and Hasselbeck went back to Hackett for 21 yards and the first down. Following a penalty, Hasselbeck threw to Hackett for the touchdown. The Bucs never caught on.

**Sour Play of the Week No. 1:** Needing a win to stay alive for the postseason, Cincinnati had second-and-10 on the Pittsburgh 20 with 22 seconds remaining in regulation, game tied, dead ball after an incompletion. The Bengals held one timeout and called it to think things over. What Marvin Lewis decided to do was kneel, then spike the ball -- assuming the winning field goal was automatic. Not only did the kneel-down move the spot backward, making what would have been a 38-yard attempt into a 39-yard attempt, had the Bengals simply run a regular play on second down, then let the clock tick to a few seconds and called the timeout, the kick attempt might have been shorter still. What, exactly, was accomplished by burning the precious final timeout in order to decide to kneel down when the goal posts were still a decent distance away?

**Sour Play of the Week No. 2:** Trailing heavily favored San Diego 27-17 with 3:26 remaining, the Arizona (Caution: May Contain Football-Like Substance) Cardinals faced fourth-and-goal on the Chargers' 2. Field goal, and the Cards never touched the ball again. Buck-buck-brawckkkkkkk! Yes, down by 10 points, you need a touchdown and a field goal. But for a coach to think "Let's take the field goal here" is buck-buck-brawckkkkkkk logic. You're on the opposition 2, very close to the touchdown. With just three minutes remaining you need the touchdown here, because the field goal that you also need can be launched from greater distance. Besides you're 5-10, why not play to win? And now you are 5-11.

**The Football Gods Chortled:** Startup NFL Network has concluded its first slate of NFL broadcasts, and "clang" is the sports term for what happened. Four of the five NFLN Thursday games were total duds, among the season's least interesting contests, culminating in the Green Bay 9, Minnesota 7 snore-fest the Thursday before Christmas. (Minnesota recorded 104 yards of offense, while the Packers lit it up for three field goals in Brett Favre's Interim Final Semifinal appearance.) Of 20 quarters NFLN aired on Thursday nights, only one, the fourth quarter of San Francisco at Seattle, was watchable -- and even those who get NFL Network likely switched that contest off when it was a drowsy 7-3 at the end of the third. Saturday night fare wasn't much better.

Embroided in controversy with the big cable carriers, most of which haven't put NFLN on basic cable, NFL Network had gambled that outraged football enthusiasts would deluge the cable carriers with complaints after hearing about the fabulous games they missed. Instead none of the games were worth calling anyone about, unless you had an immediate family member in the starting lineup. NFL Network managed the dubious distinction of producing the lowest-ever modern ratings for National Football League broadcasts. According to Nielsen Media Research, just 2.4 million people watched Browns-Steelers or Chiefs-Raiders on NFLN -- the kind of numbers generated by syndicated reruns of "That '70s Show." The NFL's highest-ranked in-house telecasts drew barely a third the average audience for a "Monday Night Football" telecast. "NFL Network stopped for no gain" was the headline on the Wall Street Journal's analysis of NFLN's first season.



Their re-runs draw about the same as NFL Network, and cost \$1 billion less.

The reason most major cable carriers won't put NFL Network on basic is the league's asking price of roughly \$8 per household per year. That is Tiffany by the standards of cable, where most channels charge perhaps \$1 per household per year to the carrier or give themselves away gratis, with the channel's only income being advertising. (If most cable channels weren't inexpensive or free to the carrier, there would not be 100 channels on basic.) Only a handful of cable products, prominently ESPN, have managed to charge more than a couple bucks per household per year, and ESPN broadcasts live game programming every day, not once in a blue moon as with NFLN. In the pricing fight, NFL Network argued that its handful of live games are so incredibly valuable, they justified NFLN becoming one of the most expensive video products ever to enter the American home. Then the football gods made the NFL Network games practically worthless!

Was this just bad luck -- or are the football gods trying to warn the NFL away from the excitement-reducing effect of in-house broadcasting? If NFLN actually got its asking price of \$8 per household per year for basic cable, that could have brought nearly \$1 billion annually in rights fees to the league. Instead NFL Network's first-year rights fees from the few carriers that put NFLN on basic

cable, plus from satellite carriers and cable companies that offered NFLN on a premium sports tier, was believed to be in the area of \$100 million. Meanwhile the league left on the table the roughly \$400 million Comcast bid to air the Thursday and Saturday night games on its sports channel. Comcast's offer was a stunning sum -- about \$50 million per game, far more than CBS, Fox or NBC pay for NFL rights and close to the breathtaking \$65 million per game ESPN pays for "Monday Night Football." Instead by airing the telecasts itself, the NFL settled for around \$12 million per game. Had the Thursday and Saturday games been sold to Comcast, each NFL owner would have received a check this season for roughly \$10 million; instead, figuring what NFLN earned minus its cost for producing the telecasts, each NFL owner might expect a check in the zone of \$2-4 million. That's a substantial difference, especially for small-market teams that are sensitive to revenue swings.

Perhaps in the future, NFLN will earn more than the league could have realized by selling the Thursday and Saturday night rights; many successful enterprises initially seemed like bad ideas. But in the first season at least, NFL Network was a huge letdown to the NFL -- plus a warning sign that there might be, in fact, a saturation point for public interest in pro football. Several influential NFL owners, prominently Pat Bowlen of Denver, have been arguing that broadcasting NFL games is a license to print money, and therefore the league should do all the telecasting and keep all proceeds. As Park Avenue (NFL headquarters) is discovering, the broadcast business is more treacherous financially than it might seem. One of the benefits to the National Football League, or any sports league, of selling game rights to ESPN or other established networks is that those networks assume the risk of market vacillations: The league receives a fixed payment regardless of whether games are exciting or popular. When the NFL airs its own games, it assumes the risk. In 2006, the NFL lost its in-house broadcasting gamble -- the first television-sector defeat by the league since the early 1960s.

Note: In the final NFL Network broadcast, Jersey/A at Washington, NFLN ran a dozen "house ads," or ads for itself. The spots fairly begged viewers to call their cable carriers and demand NFL Network. It's nice to know that even the mighty National Football League needs public opinion on its side. But the ads urging you to call your cable carriers and complain about not getting NFL Network were seen only by viewers who already got NFL Network! TMQ wondered if NFLN was running so many "house ads" because it hadn't been able to sell the time to regular advertising customers.

**Local Affiliates Update:** For the final Sunday, Park Avenue allowed both CBS and Fox to show two games, the league's first double-doubleheader. With the NBC night game, that meant five NFL contests on television on New Year's Eve, most ever for a single day. There was only one game Sunday, Jacksonville at Kansas City, pairing teams that both had to win to remain alive for the playoffs -- and despite the unprecedented five-game slate, that game was not on in the Washington, D.C., area, where TMQ lurks. There was only one other game that paired two teams with winning records, New England at Tennessee -- and that game was not shown in Washington, D.C., either. And still the league refuses to allow most of America to subscribe to NFL Sunday Ticket! Thanks to Fox, at least, for switching from the Atlanta-Philadelphia woofer to the fascinating second half and overtime of San Francisco at Denver.

**Welcome to Hyatt, Would You Like to Buy a Towel for Your Room?** The Official Wife of TMQ just signed up for the Hyatt hotel frequent-stay points program. As her welcome gift she received four coupons that can be redeemed for -- free wake-up calls. Hyatt now *charges* for wake-up calls?

**Worst Crowd Reaction:** As Rex Grossman trotted back onto the field after throwing his second interception returned for a touchdown, the Soldier Field crowd booed lustily. As the Bears left the field for intermission trailing Green Bay 23-0, the Soldier Field crowd booed lustily. What, exactly, did the Soldier Field crowd think it would accomplish by booing its own quarterback and own team? Plus the game was utterly meaningless for the Bears, who already had locked up the NFC playoffs' first seed. Hey, Soldier Field crowd -- it is impossible to win more than the first seed during the regular season. What, exactly, did you want?

**My Name is Bunk -- James Bunk:** TMQ got around to seeing the new Bond flick, which left me longing for supervillains with master control rooms built inside an entire hollowed-out mountain without anyone noticing. Supposedly for the latest iteration of the Bond franchise, the new producers wanted something akin to realism. OK. But if the new premise is realism, why are Bond and M discussing state secrets over a cell phone? And how can the United Kingdom still exist if MI6 is so incredibly incompetent it assigns just two agents to assist Bond on a big mission and *both* of them are actually working for the other side?

The point of the excruciatingly long gambling sequence in "Casino Royale" was to get Ruthless Bad Guy No. 1 to lose \$100 million so that, desperate to repay a debt to some terrorists, he would flip and tell the authorities what he knows about Even More Ruthless Bad Guy No. 2. Yet after the \$100 million is won by Bond at the casino, neither MI6 nor the CIA seize Bad Guy No. 1, simply allowing him to saunter away, setting up the next nonsensical sequence. The *whole point* of the excruciatingly long gambling sequence was to get Bad Guy No. 1 hopelessly in debt so that he could be seized and given the choice between cooperation and protection, or being rubbed out by the worse guys. Inexplicably allowed to saunter off by the CIA team surrounding the casino, Bad Guy No. 1 immediately captures Bond and the comely Vesper Lynd. Bad Guy No. 2 then attacks, kills Bad Guy No. 1 and all his henchmen, but spares Bond and Lynd. This makes it **TOTALLY OBVIOUS** that either Bond or Lynd must be working for Bad Guy No. 2. Yet Bond, M and the CIA suspect nothing, setting up the final nonsensical sequence.

Be these things as they may, "Casino Royale" seems yet another example of the action movie that's built around strings of seemingly shocking plots twists with this common denominator: Once you know the true motives revealed at the end, previous actions make no sense. Vesper betrays Bond to steal the \$100 million, apparently because she has been working for Even More Ruthless Bad Guy No. 2 all along. Bond single-handedly kills the entire Bad Guys No. 2 contingent in an improbable scene -- at one point he ducks behind a thin wooden beam that shields him from assault rifle fire at close range -- then tries to save Vesper from a collapsing Venetian building. She commits suicide by deliberately pushing away from Bond and drowning herself. Audiences think Vesper kills herself because she is ashamed that Bond has exposed her betrayal. Then in the epilogue we learn Vesper was cooperating with Bad Guy No. 2 because he kidnapped her fiancé. If love of her fiancé was Vesper's real motive, she would not have committed suicide. And if Vesper was always good, she would have told Bond the truth. It would have been **TOTALLY OBVIOUS** to her that if she handed the \$100 million over to Even More Ruthless Bad Guy No. 2, his henchmen would kill her and her fiancé anyway -- plus obvious that James Bond, super-agent, was her fiancé's sole hope for rescue. The movie is



The latest Bond movie has more beefcake than cheesecake. This really must be the 21st century.

structured to make the audience first think the Vesper Lynd character is pure as the driven snow, then think the Vesper character is the embodiment of evil, then finally think she was noble and tragic. Once you know the ending, in retrospect none of Vesper's actions made sense.

**Can ESPN Yahtzee Broadcasts Be Far Behind?** Now that ESPN is broadcasting poker and spelling bees, TMQ wonders -- how long until there is a spelling bee scandal? Some seventh grader will get caught doing megadoses of vitamin A before a bee, or signing with an agent. Maybe taking bee pollen injections. Lunch-box manufacturers will slip money under the table to spelling-bee participants. A spelling-bee winner will get an endorsement contract to do ads for some goofy made-up corporate word like Accenture or Acela. There will be a recruiting scandal when an English teacher offers a prospect free dress shoes to switch middle schools.

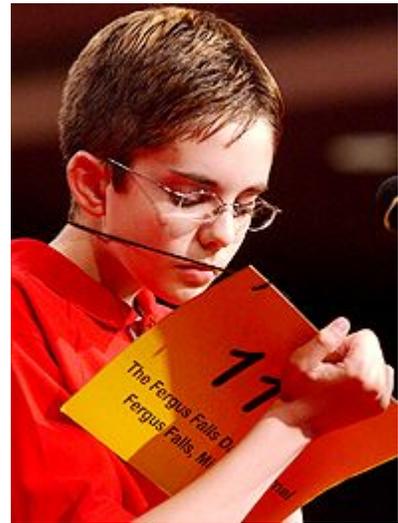
Other possible telecasts of sport-like events:

- Toboggan races.
- Science fairs -- whose volcano erupts with the most fake lava?
- Flag football tournaments. (Wait, ESPN probably actually will show this.)

**Huh? What?** Trailing playoff-bound Baltimore 16-7, the Bills faced third-and-8 on their 5 with 10 minutes remaining. Buffalo coaches sent in the "heavy package" of six offensive linemen, normally used at the goal line, ran a sweep for three yards, then punted. Huh? What? You're trailing by two scores with 10 minutes remaining, you're 7-8 and eliminated from the postseason and you're trying to set up better field position to punt from? I scarcely need to tell you the Ravens took the ball the other direction for the score that iced the game. You're 10 minutes away from a losing season, play to win! And now you have all winter to think about your losing season.

**Favre Retirement Watch:** Now that Brett Favre has played his Interim Final Semifinal game at Lambeau Field, then his Provisional Definite Last Unless Not Definite game on national television Sunday night, here are other possible Favre events for next season:

- Brett Favre's last bicycle ride to Packers' camp.
- Brett Favre's last frozen custard at Storheim's.
- Brett Favre's last home game against Oakland. (Note: All 2007 Oakland games to be blacked out for humanitarian reasons.)
- Brett Favre's last road game in New Jersey. (Note: Packers play at Giants in 2007 -- will either Favre or Tiki actually be retired?)
- Brett Favre's last address to the United Nations General Assembly. (Note: tentative.)
- Brett Favre's last exclusive interviews with "SportsCenter," Sports Illustrated, ESPN The Magazine, the "Monday Night Football" booth crew, "60 Minutes," "The Today Show," "Good Morning America," "The Situation Room" with Wolf Blitzer, "NewsHour with Jim Lehrer," "The



It can't be long until the first spelling bee recruiting scandal. Scandal. S-c-a-n-d-



Kirk Herbstreit and Bob Davie will do the color commentary on ESPN's upcoming tobogganing coverage.

Diane Rehm Show," The Atlantic Monthly and Democracy Now. (Note: Favre exclusive interviews to occur on daily basis throughout 2007.)

- Brett Favre's last flat tire in the Packers' parking lot.

**Sons of the Rich, Sons of the Saint, Where Is the Child Without Complaint?** "One lesson from 2006 is that big gains [in the stock market] can come with an unwelcome side effect, hefty capital-gains tax bills." Quotation from the Wall Street Journal on the final day of 2006. So the stock market has a record-smashing year -- the Dow Jones rose 16 percent to a record high -- and the Wall Street Journal is *complaining* that people whose stocks shot up must pay capital-gains taxes. The ideal outcome for an investment is that you end up paying capital-gains taxes! Ideally, you end up paying loads of capital-gains taxes. Would the Journal be happier if the market had crashed and investors owed Uncle Sam nothing?



When will Brett Favre have his last hot fudge?

**The Ultimate Leader Chose Poorly:** Most of rookie Jay Cutler's touchdown passes went to rookie receivers Tony Scheffler and Brandon Marshall -- the guys Cutler got used to throwing to in practice when they were second-teamers together in the first half of the season. Bottom line on the Cutler experiment: The Ultimate Leader yanked Jake Plummer for being 7-4, then Cutler went 2-3 the remainder of the season. Had Plummer continued at his previous plodding pace, Denver would have finished 10-6, fans would be calling 10-6 a huge letdown, and the Broncos now would be preparing for a playoff date.

Cutler didn't look bad for a rookie, but he was a rookie and painful mistakes were predictable. It's especially worth noting that The Ultimate Leader yanked Plummer when the Broncos were not only 7-4 but on the cusp of playing three of their remaining five at Once It Was Called Mile High Stadium, Denver having the strongest home-field advantage in the NFL. With that advantage at his back, Cutler went 1-2 at home. Actually the Denver crowd performed worse than the team. Late in the third quarter against San Francisco, Cutler became confused by a Niners' front and called Denver's final timeout; the home crowd booed lustily. He's a rookie quarterback! What, exactly, did the Denver crowd think would be accomplished by booing their rookie quarterback in his first high-pressure game?

**Left Over from TMQ's Christmas List:** Mercedes dealers have begun offering a [bicycle](#) that costs \$3,600 and has an *automatic transmission*. Remember how the early automatic transmissions for cars, such as the 1956 Chrysler Torqueflite push-button gearbox, were mocked as frills? Now almost all cars have automatic gearboxes; people buy sticks only if they prefer sporty driving. How long until automatic transmissions on bicycles become the norm?



Does this \$3,000 Mercedes bicycle have heated seats?

**Disclaimer of the Week:** The mojo Christmas gift at the Official House of TMQ was a Sony Bravia flat-panel HD television. The set came with an eight-page disclaimer in six-point type, so as to discourage reading. The disclaimer began with a "preamble," just like the

U.S. Constitution, and contained such absurd verbiage as, "To protect your rights, we need to make restrictions that forbid anybody to deny you these rights." Rights are protected by law -- not by disclaimers! Video input note: TMQ gets, and likes, Comcast Digital, but the converters malfunction so often the Comcast guy is practically a family member. Wall Street Journal chip-universe [columnist Walt Mossberg](#), perhaps the most influential writer on personal tech, devoted an entire column last week to complaining that his Motorola-built Comcast DVR digital box was driving him crazy. You'd think the CEO of Comcast would come to Mossberg's home and personally install a replacement! Comcast Digital includes 40 channels of high-quality no-commercials music, which is a great feature. But to listen to this music, essentially an advanced form of radio, you must first turn on your television. Only in America!

**On New Year's Eve at Hell's Sports Bar, a Giant Ball Drops on Each Patron:** Hell's sports bar has 28 wide-screen HD TVs, and on Sunday all were showing the Cleveland-Houston game. For the highlight program, all 28 screens in Hell's Sports Bar showed nothing but, over and over, Cleo Lemon throwing an interception from his own 34-yard line with 15 seconds remaining in the first half of a close game.

**Belichick Knew What He Was Doing:** Sports-yak types claimed bafflement that Tom Brady and the other Flying Elvii starters played most of the game at Tennessee, though New England already had won its division and could not secure a bye. But whether the Patriots finished as the third or fourth seed was at stake, and Belichick needed a win to remain alive for third. Belichick knew the third seed won't have to play at San Diego in the divisionals round, while finishing third would insure that if New England and Indianapolis meet in the playoffs, the site would be Foxboro. Later in the day Indianapolis beat Miami, gaining the third seed. But it made sense for New England to play to win in hopes the Colts would falter, as they almost did.

**Another Coach Fails to Observe TMQ's Law of the Obvious:** Last year in its bowl game, the Offense of the Future run by Texas Tech wheezed out, recording only 10 points. This year sure was different, Texas Tech staging a thriller, coming back from a 38-7 deficit to beat Minnesota 44-41 in overtime (the largest comeback in bowl history). You know what I'm going to say next: Sometimes all a team needs to do is run the ball up the middle for no gain and everything will be fine. From the point at which the Gophers took their 38-7 lead until the start of overtime, Minnesota coaches called 11 passing plays and 11 rushes. The passing calls resulted in two sacks and five incompletions, stopping the clock. Behind by 31 points, Texas Tech was doomed if Minnesota simply ground down time; obligingly, the leading team kept stopping the clock. There were five seconds showing when Texas Tech snapped the ball for the 52-yard field goal that forced overtime. Had *even one* of those five incompletions by Minnesota instead been a rush up the middle for no gain, Texas Tech would have run out of time. Minnesota -- you're ahead by 31 points, why are you calling passes and stopping the clock? Two days later, the Gophers fired head coach Glen Mason.

**Why Tactics Matter:** "Do the Redskins' safeties think they are back to receive a punt?" That's what my 11-year-old, Spenser, asked when Washington lined up its safeties 15 to 20 yards deep against Jersey/A, then had them backpedal at the snap to boot. The G-Persons have not completed many deep passes lately, so it was unclear why Washington's defensive coordinator, the tastefully named



The disclaimer warns about the software -- it should warn about the shows.

Gregg Williams, wanted his safeties so far back. But having the safeties so deep opened things up for Tiki Barber's monster night, since only nine defenders were available to oppose Barber until he was in the open field where he could outrun people. Jersey/A leading 10-7, both safeties lined up more than 15 yards deep and Barber ran for 11 yards. On the next snap, both safeties lined up almost 20 yards deep and Barber went 55 yards for the touchdown that gave the Giants their eventual winning margin. Free safety Sean Taylor whiffed on an open-field tackle attempt on the play, while strong safety Vernon Fox was nowhere to be seen, despite lining up halfway to the end zone. Putting your safeties way back deep like you expect a Hail Mary is an invitation to run -- and Barber accepted the invitation.

**Romo: From Zero to Hero to 56 Percent All-Pro:** Perennially, Tuesday Morning Quarterback complains that the Pro Bowl voting is a popularity contest, not an attempt to determine who's had the best seasons. One indicator is that voting closes after 14 games -- why don't the final two games count? Because voting closes after 88 percent of the action, TMQ calls the chosen the 88 Percent All-Pros. Pro Bowl absurdity reached new lows last month, as Tony Romo was chosen as an NFC quarterback despite his having a career total of nine starts on the day voting closed. That made Romo a 56 Percent All Pro. Sure, the NFC is weak at quarterback, and Romo looked swell in several of those nine games. But would anyone have voted for Tony after watching his 10th outing? Hard upon being awarded a free ticket to Hawaii, in his 10th outing Romo led the Cowboys to just seven points at home against Philadelphia in a game that cost Dallas control of the NFC East, in the process recording a quarterback rating of 45.5, which is only slightly better than the rating you get for hurling the ball into the ground on every play. (If every pass clangs to the ground incomplete, an NFL quarterback gets a 39.6 rating.) In his next game, Romo again lost at home, this time to woeful Detroit, and his two careless fumbles were the game's decisive plays. Naming a guy who has played only nine games *in his career* to the Pro Bowl roster is a satire of the superficiality of Pro Bowl voting. Had Pro Bowl voting had closed after the 16th game, rather than the 14th, there's no way Romo would be Hawaii-bound. Thanks, Tony, for immediately proving my point on national television.



The Cowboys Cheerleaders were a lot more ready for Detroit than the Cowboys.

Romo note: All that media froth about the astonishingly unstoppable Romo was based on his first few games, when defenses seemed to relax for him and beginner's luck was in play. For the month of December, Romo finished with eight interceptions, seven fumbles and a pedestrian 77.1 passer rating.

Hawaii note: One reason voters "reached" for a gent who had played only nine games is that the Pro Bowl takes three quarterbacks; Romo was the [third chosen](#). Annually a total of seven running backs and quarterbacks are sent to Hawaii from each conference, along with a total of eight offensive linemen. In football, there are twice as many offensive linemen as quarterbacks and running backs on the field. This means quarterbacks and running backs are significantly overrepresented at the Pro Bowl, compared to offensive linemen. Why wasn't the slot awarded to Romo as third quarterback instead granted to Jamar Nesbit of New Orleans or Ruben Brown of Chicago, blockers who've had Pro Bowl-caliber seasons and were shut out by the event's bias against offensive linemen?

**Cheer-babe Professionalism Watch:** Kickoff temperature 45 degrees, Cowboys' players in wraps and ski caps on the sidelines, the Cowboys' Cheerleaders wore two-piece summer outfits. Outstanding professionalism! If only the Cowboys themselves had wanted to beat the Lions as badly as the cheerleaders did. Kickoff temperature 46 degrees in Baltimore, the Ravens' cheerleaders came out in bare midriffs, and their professionalism was, indeed, rewarded by the football gods.

**TMQ in the News:** Last week the Buffalo News ran [this profile](#), by Dan Herbeck, of Official Brother Frank Easterbrook, recently named Chief Judge of the federal appeals court for the upper Midwest. Among other things, the profile notes that at our high school,

[Kenmore West](#), Frank's classmate and pal was Wolf Blitzer, now the prominent CNN anchor. (The Blitzers lived a couple blocks over.) The 1966 Kenmore West senior class play was "The Diary of Anne Frank," with Frank playing Otto Frank and Wolf playing Hans van Dann. Looking for a great place to raise kids? You can buy a really nice, high-quality home in Kenmore, N.Y., a pleasant town with an old-fashioned Main Street, for half the prevailing price of housing in most big-city suburbs, then send your kids to Kenmore West, recently named a New York State "School of Excellence." Anyway, now that Frank is the chief federal judge for the Seventh Circuit, which sits in Chicago and has jurisdiction over Wisconsin, Illinois and Indiana, my suggestion is -- don't break the law in Wisconsin, Illinois or Indiana.

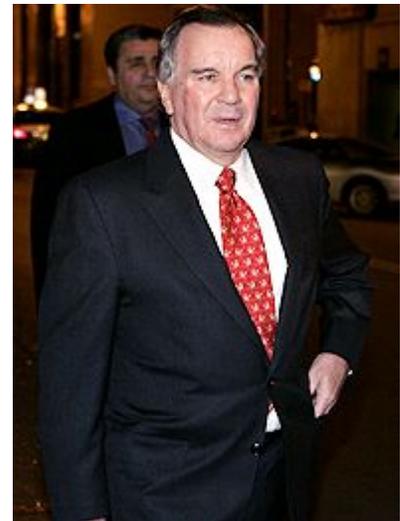
True story! Recently I met Richard Daley, the mayor of Chicago, who's done a fine job of presiding over the revitalization of the City of Big Shoulders. Mayor Daley said, "I hear great things about your brother. But it's the state and county judges, not the federal judges, I pay attention to." You need to know Chicago machine politics to appreciate that fully.

**TMQ in the News No. 2:** Last week, Forbes magazine called Tuesday Morning Quarterback "popular." Forbes, you have excellent taste.

**Hufnagel Also Asked to Turn in Cafeteria Pass:** TMQ tracks how coaches preach "win as a team, lose as a team" and then blame their players for defeats. A subset of this phenomenon is head coaches blaming assistant coaches. As Jersey/A has crumbled in the second half of the season, Tom "Mr. Personality" Coughlin has publicly undercut his players, especially Eli Manning, and screamed at officials so boorishly he would have been ejected from an NBA game. (Tuesday Morning Quarterback really likes the NBA's new rules about coach decorum.) Last week Mr. Personality shifted the blame to Giants' offensive coordinator John Hufnagel, not merely taking away his playcalling duties but taking away Hufnagel's title. Did workers steal into the Giants' facility late at night and scratch the words "offensive coordinator" off Hufnagel's door? Last season was the second-highest scoring in Giants' history, and Hufnagel was writing the game plans and calling the plays then. My guess is Hufnagel was pretty much the same coach this season as he was



When Wolf was acting in the senior play at Kenmore West High School, they made him memorize his lines.



Duh Mare backs Da Bares.

last season. But this season things aren't going well, so Mr. Personality throws a fit of pique about Hufnagel having the words "offensive coordinator" following his name.

And yes, the Giants put up 34 points on Saturday night against Washington, but it might have helped that they were playing the league's 30th-ranked defense. Game announcers kept saying improved playcalling accounted for Barber's big night. Playcalling definitely matters, but fill-in Kevin Gilbride called 23 runs for Barber; the weeks before, in Jersey/A losses, Hufnagel called 19 runs, 16 for Barber. Do you really think a couple more handoffs to Barber completely altered the Giants' dynamic? Maybe Hufnagel did need to lose his playcalling duties to shake things up. But the dignified coach keeps that sort of decision private -- Coughlin called a news conference to announce he was blaming someone else. The boss who tries to shift blame to his assistants is telling the world he does not deserve to be boss.

**Stop Me Before I Blitz Again! No. 1:** Baltimore big-blitzed Buffalo often, and the results were classic big-blitz -- the Ravens surrendered a 44-yard touchdown when blitzing six, and intercepted a pass and returned it for a touchdown when blitzing six. In the second half of the season, Baltimore defensive coordinator Rex Ryan has called a lot of "overload" blitzes -- all blitzers come from the same area, overwhelming blockers on that side. This is the sort of tactic that works against ordinary teams but backfires against elite teams, because when you overload-blitz on one side, the other side must be open. Let's watch to see if the overload blitz backfires on Baltimore in the playoffs.

**Stop Me Before I Blitz Again! No. 2:** Jacksonville big-blitzed Kansas City often, and the results were classic big-blitz -- the Jaguars, who went into the game surrendering an average of 16 points playing fairly conventional defense, surrendered 35 points using the big-blitz. Score Kansas City 14, Jax 10, Jacksonville called the rarely seen eight-man blitz. It's rarely seen for a reason! Easy 35-yard touchdown pass to Eddie Kennison.



The football gods smiled on these outfits with an improbable final-hour playoff invitation for the Chiefs.

**Leftover Christmas Week Points:** There was no Tuesday Morning Quarterback last week, owing to Christmas, but an observation about the little-watched games played on Christmas Eve bears making. Carolina at Atlanta, though a 10-3 snoozer between disappointing teams racing each other to the bottom, was fascinating from the standpoint of football tactics -- because the Panthers often lined up without a quarterback! Carolina entered the contest with Jake Delhomme hurt and Chris Weinke 1-17 as a starter on his career. For 10 downs in the game (nine that counted, one nullified by penalty), Weinke came off the field and tailback DeAngelo Williams lined up in the shotgun. Each time Williams simply took the snap and ran; the result was seven first downs in nine tries.

Unless the little-watched nature of the Christmas Eve games causes this tactical maneuver to go overlooked, coaches must notice that Carolina took its quarterback off the field and gained seven first downs on nine plays. Think about the standard rushing down in the NFL or Division I. The quarterback takes the snap, hands off and then stands around watching: meaning the offense is operating 10-on-11. In high school, the quarterback is usually a rushing threat, and often after handing off at least runs out a roll-out fake, meaning the offense is operating 11-on-11. One reason the Falcons rushed so well this season is that Michael Vick's ability to run meant Atlanta running

plays were 11-on-11. Taking the quarterback out had the same impact for Carolina. Cats coaches obviously had lost confidence in Weinke, who attempted only seven passes in the contest. If you're going to rush on most downs anyway -- Carolina's sole touchdown drive was 15 rushing plays and one pass -- why not pull the quarterback for a running back and make the equation 11-on-11?

Schedule note: There will also be no Tuesday Morning Quarterback on Dec. 25, 2007. Put that in your day-planners now.

**Darrent Williams, 1982-2007:** Once at a Bill Cosby concert I heard Cosby say, "Nothing good has ever happened between midnight and dawn." He meant this seriously, and proceeded to talk about why it was foolish for anyone except cops and hospital personnel to be anywhere but home during those hours. According to initial reports -- bearing in mind that initial reports from the scenes of tragedies are often wrong -- Williams was murdered leaving a nightclub about 2 a.m., the morning following the Broncos' final game of the season. Yes, it was New Year's, and many people are out to all hours that morning. But should they be?

I am a big believer in the power of statistics to help us lead our lives. Statistics cannot tell us what will happen, but can suggest a great deal about what is likely to happen. Statistics tell us we should not fear airline flights but should be very wary about crossing the street. (There were 4,881 pedestrians deaths in the United States in 2005, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.) Statistics tell us we shouldn't worry about drinking tap water but should be cautious about corn syrup in foods. And statistics tell us we are far more likely to be victims of violent crime, or involved in automobile accidents, after midnight than before midnight. The sorts of people who are out on the streets in the wee hours, or driving on the roads then, are the sorts of people whom the wise avoid. It's not enough to mourn the loss of Darrent Williams. Learn the lesson: When the clock strikes midnight, you belong at home.

**Hidden Play of the Week:** Hidden plays are ones that never make highlight reels, but stop or sustain drives. On the first possession of overtime, Denver faced third-and-1 at midfield. San Francisco lined up with only three defensive linemen -- I thought, "This is going to be an easy conversion and the Broncos will march to win." Instead, both San Francisco safeties crashed from the outside and The Ultimate Leader inexplicably called a slow-developing rush from a set with Mike Bell eight yards deep. Safety Keith Lewis dropped Bell for a loss, the Broncos punted and you began to get this eerie feeling the Squared Sevens would win. The Broncos need one yard, the other team has only three defensive linemen on the field -- why not just quarterback sneak? Say what you will about Jake Plummer, he's a veteran and would have known to audible to the sneak. Jay Cutler turned and handed the ball to the guy eight yards deep.

**This Fulfills My Obligation to Say Something About Several Games:** Sorry, it was just impossible to care about games like St. Louis-Minnesota where neither team had anything to play for. Note: Les Mouflons missed the postseason despite being second-best in the league in turnover differential, at plus-14.

**Jersey/A and Jersey/B Reach Playoffs by Beating Teams That Finished a Combined 7-25:** Congratulations to Eric "I Was a Teenaged Coach" Mangini and his first-year postseason achievement, which I reserve the right to claim to have predicted. ("Don't assume this is a lost season for Jersey/B" -- me on Aug. 15.) But making the playoffs by beating Oakland essentially is backing in. On the first Oakland play of the fourth quarter, Aaron Brooks was sacked and lost a fumble on the Raiders' 22. A Jet blitzed from the offensive left, and extremely highly overpaid Oakland left tackle Robert Gallery, second overall choice of the draft in 2004, simply stood there doing nothing, not attempting to block anyone, as the blitzer went past. During the heyday of

"Saturday Night Live," Bill Murray had a routine about how the United States military should become all-female: "Then if there's a war and the women beat the Soviet Union, great. If they lose, we say, 'Hey, you beat a bunch of girls.'" Now let's find out how Jersey/B performs when not playing the football equivalent of Murray's bunch of girls.

**Single Worst Play of the Season So Far:** It's overtime in the Pittsburgh at Cincinnati game. The defending champion Steelers are eliminated from postseason play, but Cincinnati must win to keep its playoff chance alive -- and it would later turn out that had Cincinnati won, Denver's surprise loss would have put the Trick or Treats into the postseason. Pittsburgh faces first-and-10 on its 33. The Bengals start a chain-reaction of fiasco by big-blitzing. Santonio Holmes catches a quick slant in front of Cincinnati corner Tory James, who stumbles. James then *turns around and watches Holmes run 67 yards for the winning touchdown*. It's overtime of the final game, if you don't catch the Pittsburgh runner your season ends, and James just stood there watching Holmes run; eventually, he sort-of jogged in the general direction of the play. Several other Bengals just stood watching Holmes head up the sideline, too. It's overtime of the final game, if you don't catch the Pittsburgh runner your season ends! Cincinnati Bengals, you committed the Single Worst Play of the 2006 Regular Season. Afterward, Carson Palmer whined, "This is just another game we shouldn't have lost to a team we feel we're better than." Carson: You prove this on the field, not in the media room. The no-account Bengals had no business in the playoffs, and the football gods spoke.

**Reader Animadversion:** Got a complaint or a deeply held grievance? Write me at [TMQ\\_ESPN@yahoo.com](mailto:TMQ_ESPN@yahoo.com). Include your real name and the name of your hometown, and I may quote you by name unless you instruct me otherwise. Note: giving your hometown improves your odds of being quoted.

**Generic Forecast Update:** For seven consecutive seasons, Tuesday Morning Quarterback has offered this generic forecast, "The team goin' to Disney World will come from among the group that did not make the cut for 'Monday Night Football.'" That leaves me as a Kansas City Chiefs man, as the Flintstones are the sole team to qualify for the tournament that did not appear on "Monday Night Football."

**Next Week:** Brett Favre shoots to break Frank Sinatra's all-time record for most retirements.

**Monday, January 8, 2007**  
**Updated: January 10, 3:50 PM ET**  
Stop obsessing over coaches!

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By Gregg Easterbrook

Right now is the annual peak for coach obsession, as NFL teams fire and hire head coaches. Practically every aspect of American society has in recent decades become overblown – pumped up with money, media focus and popular fixation. Coaching is no exception. Coaches at all levels of sports have changed from figures frowning on the sidelines to celebrities who receive high pay, sign endorsement deals and are spoken of as possessing mystical abilities. NFL head coaches now earn at least \$1 million per season, and several earn \$4 million or more; dozens of college football coaches now earn more than the president of their colleges; in an increasing number of high schools, the best-paid person is the football coach. Beyond money, there's an increasing sense that having top coaches is essential to the well-being of a city, college or high school. Coaches, especially football coaches, have never been a hotter commodity. Why?

Let me propose that the current national obsession with coaches reflects these themes:

- The illusion of control.
- The abdication by politicians and intellectuals of the father-figure role.
- The exaggeration of insider knowledge.
- The illusion of special motivational ability.
- The winner-take-all of modern economics.
- The Walter Mitty daydream.

First, the illusion of control. Obviously some coaches are better than others – I'd certainly rather be coached by Pete Carroll than Nick Saban. (More on Saban below.) But as sports become ever-more important and ever-more analyzed, there seems an increasing tendency to want to believe that everything on the field happens for a reason. The ball didn't just bounce into some guy's hands, good coaching put the guy into the right position. The receiver didn't just run fast and get open, hours of round-the-clock study enabled the coach to determine precisely what pass pattern to call. It wasn't that the Colts played well Saturday while the Chiefs had an off day, this happened because Tony Dungy did an astonishingly good job of preparing his team using subtle psychological tools plus mega-brilliant game planning, while Herman Edwards did a poor job of preparing his team. Actually, Dungy and Edwards probably both did pretty much the same things all week before that game – Indianapolis just has better players than Kansas City. But we don't want to believe that, we want to believe the coach is in near-total control of events and outcomes. The explosion in conspiracy-theory thinking, in books and movies supposing there are secret agencies and master plans controlling our lives, spills over into sports in the sense that we want to believe Team A didn't win mainly because it's better than Team B, it won because someone was in control of the entire event. That someone has to be the coach. The phrase "everything happens for a reason" has taken on resonance in popular culture, and not only in religious circles. We don't want to believe luck and coincidence are major factors in our lives. We want to believe someone is in control. Project this thinking onto sports and the importance of the head coach inflates.

Second, the abdication by politicians and intellectuals of their father-figure roles. For good or ill, for generations people have looked to political leaders and intellectuals as father figures of society. Even if you had a good relationship with a good father, you still need other father figures, since your own father inevitably will pass on, and at any rate most people's own fathers are not players in high-profile public matters. But roughly since Watergate, politicians steadily have demeaned and trivialized themselves; is there *anyone* on the current national political scene you'd want as a father? A few generations ago, millions looked for life guidance to the examples of public-spirited intellectual figures such as Albert Schweitzer or Upton Sinclair. Today's intellectuals seem arrogant, money-focused and contemptuous of the average person. So we switch our father-figure thinking onto coaches who seem both men of achievement and who share one of our common concerns, love of sports. A few coaches such as Knute Rockne achieved national renown in the period before general cynicism. But it may be telling that the onset of the coach as superstar, the first instance being Vince Lombardi, came roughly at the same time disillusion with political and intellectual leadership began setting in.

Next is the exaggeration of insider knowledge. Pretty much every possible play and tactic, and every practice technique is known to every coach. Of course, it's also true that all chefs work with the same ingredients; two people can employ the same basic knowledge and one can come to a much better result than the other. But we seem to want to believe good coaches aren't merely people who are good at their professions, we want to believe they have incredible insider information. This mirrors the current national fascination with the notion that hush-hush secret information is at the crux of world events. Hollywood encourages this view, when the less sexy reality is that most events reflect nothing more than what meets the eye.

Next is the illusion of special motivational ability. Anyone who's been involved in competitive athletics knows that 90 percent of motivation comes from within the athlete. But the coaching guild doesn't want you to know that. A good coach can help the athlete realize the last 10 percent of motivation, while a bad coach can depress what the athlete already has – but in either case the real power of athletics comes from the players' psyches. But we live in a moment when celebrities and supposed experts get \$50,000 to give motivational speeches, during which they stand on a stage flailing their arms and screaming "Get going, get going." We want to believe there are secret motivational tools that will unlock our hidden potential. Athletes will tell you that an amazing percentage even of successful coaches have poor interpersonal skills and are poor motivators – mainly, they yell. Show me a coach who yells a lot, and I'll show you a coach who is wasting everybody's time. But the illusion that coaches have incredible motivational abilities adds to their mystique.

Next is the winner-take-all aspect of modern economics, nodding here to Robert Frank of Cornell University, who has documented this phenomenon. Coaches at the top of pro and college football today earn 50 times what a high school varsity football coach earns. Not a single one of the top pro or college coaches is 50 times more able than the typical high school coach. I'd estimate that today's very best football coaches, such as Bill Belichick or Carroll, are approximately twice as good at what they do than any high school football coach who won a 4A or 5A state championship this fall – but Belichick and Carroll earn 50 times as much. At the high school, small-college, big-college and NFL level there are several thousand skilled, competent football coaches of approximately equal ability – coaching skill at the small-college level is especially overlooked. Of the several thousand able football coaches, a handful become rich while the rest labor for typical wages. This distorts our perspective of coaches, as winner-take-all economics distorts our perspective of Hollywood figures, CEOs, rock stars and the rest.

Finally there is Walter Mitty's daydream. We can't imagine actually becoming an NFL player, because we're not strong enough or fast enough. We can't imagine becoming a movie star because we're not good-looking enough, or becoming a pop star because we know we can't sing. The sports coach, on the other hand, has no special physical abilities or God-given gifts. Coaches can't run a 4.4 or hit a high note. *I could be like him, I could run that team* is in a lot of fans' minds. We don't imagine ourselves actually becoming Supreme Court justices and heart surgeons because we know professions like these involve many years of intense study and training. Coaching, on the other hand, seems like something almost anyone could learn. In the end, we revere coaches as persons of incredible prowess when really they are not all that different from the typical man or woman. And they would prefer this not be generally understood, thank you.

In other news, in the NFC wild-card playoffs on Saturday, why didn't Dallas pull the goalie? Down 21-20 with seven seconds remaining, Seattle punting from its 28, the 'Boys' sole realistic hope was a blocked punt. Yet Dallas had a return man back, and he did nothing but watch the kick bounce out of bounds at midfield. Then for the final snap, Seattle did what Oklahoma failed to do against Boise State in the Tostitos Fiesta Bowl – lined up its defenders on the goal line. In both cases, the opposition was at midfield on the final down, needing to reach the end zone. Oklahoma put its deepest defenders at the 15, gave up the touchdown, and went on to lose in overtime. Seattle lined up three men along the goal line, stopped the pass and won. In a situation where the opponent must score a long touchdown on the final snap, your defenders belong on the goal line.

In fashion news, on the sideline at Philadelphia, Donovan McNabb wore a ski cap, gloves, parka and what looked like snowmobile pants – and it was 52 degrees. The cheerleaders were in leotards and tank tops! Meanwhile, New England's coach Belichick is starting to look like the guy who hustles you at the train station saying he needs a dollar for bus fare. On Sunday, Belichick failed even to reach his recent low standard of sideline attire, wearing a hoodie with the sleeves cut off. What's Belichick going to do next, show up in old sweat pants and sandals, needing a shave?

In zebra news, wild-card weekend ended without a blown call – OK, the holding call against Chris Snee of the Giants was ticky-tack, but did not affect the drive – plus several difficult calls corrected on replay. Since we complain mightily when the officials get calls wrong, let's compliment them for getting these games right. Officials have good and bad games, just as players do. Michael Jordan once said that whenever he spoke to an official before tipoff, he would say, "Have a good game." Audiences need to appreciate that officials are trying to perform, too.

Now here's a gambling tip. As TMQ notes, my compromise with my Baptist upbringing is to be pro-topless but anti-gambling. Wagering only brings regret and sorrow. But if you're making the harmless \$5 workplace wager on the NFL playoffs, bet the home teams this weekend. Home teams in the NFL divisional round are the surest thing in sports. Since the current playoff format was adopted in 1990, home teams in the divisional round are 51-13, a .796 winning figure. Usually the reason the home teams are home in the first place is that they are better than the wild-card teams. Equally important, in the divisional round the home teams have spent a bye week relaxing in hot tubs while their opponents were out in the cold being pounded. Home teams dominate the NFL divisional round, so check-mark them in your office pool. You don't even need to know which team is playing!

A week later in the championship round, the home advantage dissipates. Since 1990, home teams in conference championship games are 18-14, a .562 winning figure. That is nearly identical to the rate at which home teams have won all games in the past decade. In the championship round, nobody's had the previous week off and the Super Bowl is just one W away. Players leave everything on the field in championship contests. So at the next step the home team won't necessarily be the favorite.

But this weekend, look homeward. And of course, if the visitors win, remember the Tuesday Morning Quarterback ironclad no-questions-asked guarantee: All Predictions Wrong or Your Money Back.

In other football news, let TMZ's annual awards begin. Soon comes my All-Unwanted All-Pros. Beyond that is the coveted "longest award in sports," the annual Tuesday Morning Quarterback Non-QB Non-RB NFL MVP. As the warmup, below I name my Player of the Year.

**Stat of the Week No. 1:** Tom Brady is 11-1 as a starter in the playoffs.

**Stat of the Week No. 2:** In playoff games started by Brady, the Patriots' defense has allowed an average of only 16.7 points.

**Stat of the Week No. 3:** From the point Tony Romo was named to the Pro Bowl, Dallas lost all remaining games.

**Stat of the Week No. 4:** In three games against the Eagles this season, Tiki Barber averaged 4 yards per carry. In all other games, he averaged 5.4 yards.

**Stat of the Week No. 5:** At one point, Indianapolis had 23 first downs to zero for Kansas City.

**Stat of the Week No. 6:** The Jets are on a 1-8 road streak in the playoffs.

**Stat of the Week No. 7:** Nine of Ty Law's 56 career interceptions have come against Peyton Manning.

**Stat of the Week No. 8:** Indianapolis, which travels to Baltimore this weekend, is 2-7 in outdoor playoff games.

**Stat of the Week No. 9:** New Orleans has never won a playoff game after the wild-card round.

**Stat of the Week No. 10:** Marty Schottenheimer is 5-12 in the postseason and has not coached a playoff victory in 13 years.

**Cheerleader of Wild-Card Weekend:** Kammie of the Seattle Sea-Gals, who has a degree in psychology from the University of Washington, which means your line will not work on her. According to her team bio, Kammie is classically trained in ballet and jazz dance and lists reading as her favorite hobby, which is not something often encountered in cheer-babes bios. Here is [a group portrait of the Sea-Gals](#) in their alluring new "Hello, sailor" summer outfits.

**Sweet Plays of Wild-Card Weekend:** Dallas had third-and-7 on the Blue Men Group 8, trailing 21-20, less than two minutes remaining. Seattle appeared finished. Tony Romo threw to Jason Witten, who looked like he would either score or get the first down at the 1. Lofa Tatupu made an all-strength wrestling tackle, setting up fourth-and-1. Then came the botched hold that will go down in football lore – but wait, Romo scrambles left and has the angle for the first down or touchdown. If he makes either, Dallas probably wins. The Seahawks' Jordan Babineaux dove at Romo's ankles from behind and stopped him just where Witten was stopped. Seattle ball, Seattle wins. Who had a chance to block Babineaux? Kicker Martin Gramatica, who offered only a halfhearted shove. I never liked Mike Vanderjagt either. But he's ill-tempered, and this play called for an ill-tempered kicker, rather than one who shies from contact. If everything about this play is exactly the same except Vanderjagt is still the Cowboys' kicker, I say he pastes Babineaux, and Romo scores the touchdown.

**Sweet Play of Wild-Card Weekend:** The simple halfback flare pass is fairly easy to complete, and often no one is assigned to cover the halfback flare, ensuring a 5- to 10-yard gain. Don Coryell,

sensei of the pass-wacky attack, said a team should call five halfback flares per game, both for easy yards and to get the safeties nervous about the short man so eventually they will overlook the deep man. Leading 23-16, New England faced third-and-goal on the Jersey/B 7 with 5:21 remaining. The Jets blitz six. Kevin Faulk runs a simple halfback flare into the right flat, and records the untouched touchdown that ices the game.

**Sour Tactics of Wild-Card Weekend:** Trailing 23-8, Kansas City took possession at its 18 with 10 minutes remaining – and did not go hurry-up! The Chiefs played the whole game like they'd been out late the night before. But watching Trent Green casually form the huddle, then slowly walk up to the line – trailing by two touchdowns with the clock ticking down – was beyond odd.

**Sweet 'N' Sour Play of Wild-Card Weekend No. 1:** Leading 6-0, Indianapolis had first-and-10 on the Kansas City 45, holding one timeout. Peyton Manning threw to Dallas Clark at the Chiefs' 36, a little too far for a field-goal attempt. The Colts ran up to the line with Manning making the "spike the ball" gesture. You remember when Dan Marino faked this gesture in a clock-stop situation. After the fake spike gesture, Manning handed off to tailback Joseph Addai, who ran up the middle to the Chiefs' 32, where Indianapolis called timeout with two seconds remaining. Field goal, 9-0 at the intermission. Nobody executes complex decisions on the fly better than the Colts, and the ability of Manning to recognize that a few more yards were needed, then signal the correct trick play, was sweet. Meanwhile as Addai took the handoff and headed up the middle, he was surrounded by Kansas City players. Had the Chiefs defenders simply allowed Addai to run one more yard before tackling him, the clock would have expired. While Indianapolis was showing perfect situational awareness, Kansas City was showing none. That was sour.

**Sweet 'N' Sour Play of Wild-Card Weekend No. 2:** Trailing 20-13 late in the third quarter, the Jets were moving the ball well against the New England defense. With first-and-10 at midfield, the Jets called a quick hitch to the left receiver. Blitzing Patriots' linebacker Rosevelt Colvin jumped into the path of the throw, nearly intercepting, then Colvin jumped up and down and slapped his helmet over the dropped pick. Everyone watched Colvin jump up and down – except Bill Belichick and his assistants, who were screaming "live ball!" because the toss had been a lateral. Enormous Flying Elvii defensive tackle Vince Wilfork grabbed the loose ball and ran to the Jersey/B 15, which was sweet. A field goal followed. Play to the whistle! Afterward numerous Jets said they didn't realize the play was a lateral, but you don't even need to know, just play to the whistle! No whistle had sounded. Meanwhile, the Jets failed to design the hitch screen to ensure that it did not change from a forward pass to a lateral and thus live ball. That was sour.

**Fanfare About a Fanfare:** Last week at the funeral for Gerald R. Ford, Copland's magnificent "Fanfare for the Common Man" sounded. This was appropriate, as few appreciate that the person who would become President Ford was born into modest circumstances as Leslie King Jr., and in youth lived a hand-to-mouth existence until his mother left an abusive husband. Last week in California at the second inauguration of Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, "Fanfare for the Common Man" also sounded. Come on! Schwarzenegger is a multimillionaire celebrity who hangs out with rock stars and the Silicon Valley uber-rich. Yes, Arnold started modestly, too. But there's been a trend in recent years of politicians using the Copland fanfare because it is so magnificent and because it is associated with status, having been played at the funeral for Robert Kennedy. That was debatable given Kennedy's favored birth, but the occasion was a funeral. Playing "Fanfare for the Common Man" at routine political events seems an exercise in politicians' egos. Schwarzenegger might not know what the arrangement signifies in the history of music, but surely does know that for a living politician to walk on to a stage to this mighty fanfare is to say, in musical terms, "I am

the most important person in the world." Please, politicians, stop misusing this air! Save it for memorials, and for events that celebrate the common man.

**Jersey/B at New England Analysis:** Rarely do you behold both teams trying to trick each other with exactly the same game plan. Bill Belichick's Patriots and Eric "I Was a Teenaged Coach" Mangini's Jets both went hurry-up most of the game, used four-wides to spread the field, tried to force the other team not to substitute on defense and tried to catch the other team with 12 men on the field. Several times both teams raced up to the line and quick-snapped. Belichick likes the no-huddle pace to keep the opponent's defense from substituting. So does his acolyte Mangini. Till the fourth quarter, two versions of the same tactics battled to a draw.

On defense, the Jets opened with a 2-5-4 – the odd-looking defense Belichick himself drew up for the Bills-Giants Super Bowl, when Buffalo was playing hurry-up and trying to prevent opponents from substituting. Mangini threw in a strange and, perhaps, novel innovation. Most of the Jets' front seven was moving before the snap – not just switching from gap to gap but walking back and forth in all directions. They seemed to be wandering around. It was the Times Square Defense, since it looked like a crowd milling about aimlessly in Times Square. The goal was to create confusion for the New England offensive line about which of the milling-around defenders would rush. It sure was interesting to watch, but didn't work, the Jets sacking Brady only once. Every postseason, the Patriots' offensive line becomes near flawless. They're off to their usual start.

**TMQ's Nightmare: Overpaid CEO Hosts Senator on Corporate Jet:** Last week, two news items reflected recent TMQ complaints – overpaid Home Depot CEO Robert Nardelli was forced out, and the House of Representatives voted to forbid Congress members from flying on corporate-supplied private jets unless they pay the true cost of the flight.

Combining regular income, stock options, pension and a golden parachute, Nardelli received \$274 million for six years of work. That's \$34,250 *an hour*. That's about 3,000 times the hourly wage of a Home Depot worker. That's \$275,000 per day – five times as much *per day* as the typical American family earns in a year. Good management is of value to a company's shareholders: skilled corporate officers should be well paid. But there's a difference between "well paid" and something akin to looting. Why isn't Nardelli's \$274 million, taken from the shareholders, simply viewed as embezzlement? Home Depot stock fell from \$43 to \$41 under Nardelli's tenure, a 21 percent drop when calculated for inflation. The CEO cannot control a company's stock price, and excessive emphasis on stock price creates a temptation to cook the books. But it's absurd to think that shareholders can get hosed under a CEO's watch, and for that the CEO deserves \$274 million. The Home Depot board offered Nardelli the terms that led to the \$274 million. Boards of directors have a self-interest in overpaying CEOs, because many board members are themselves CEOs who know their own pay will rise if other CEOs' pay rises. With Nardelli's \$274 million, CEO overpay has reached runaway levels. What the Home Depot board did was perfectly legal, and that in itself is a scandal. The word for what many public-company CEOs and their boards are up to should be: embezzlement.

As for members of Congress flying around on corporate jets, not only should the people's representatives have to wait in line at the airport like everyone else, the main thing politicians do when they fly on private jets is shuttle from one fundraising event to another. If lack of access to corporate jets makes it harder for members of Congress to fundraise – good! Now it's time for the Senate to match the House restriction.

**New York Times Chases Tuesday Morning Quarterback:** Two months ago, TMQ did an item on the [shortage of parking spaces for private jets](#). Last week the august New York Times (that's the

august newspaper, not an August edition) [caught up to the story](#). Times reporter Elsa Brenner adds a hilarious detail. Park Avion, a California firm, is building [private-jet condominium hangars](#) that will sell for about \$2 million each.

**Preposterous Punt Watch:** "Now the Cowboys are forced to punt," Al Michaels pronounced as Dallas faced fourth-and-4 on the Seattle 40, trailing 3-0. They're not *forced* to punt. The idea that not punting on fourth down is some wild, desperate gamble infects the very vocabulary of football. The average NFL play gains about 5 yards; had Dallas gone for it, success was a strong possibility. Instead, punt into the end zone for a measly net of 20 yards in field position.

**Dallas at Seattle Analysis:** Dallas is positioned to win with a short field goal, and Tony Romo fumbles the hold. But why is Romo the holder? Bill Parcells has now lost five games in the past two seasons on failed field-goal attempts in the final moments, and that's gotta hurt. But Parcells let Romo stay the holder after being promoted to starter at quarterback. Drew Bledsoe is earning \$3 million to hold a clipboard. Why wasn't he holding for kicks and concentrating on this role? Seattle came into the game with both starting cornerbacks inactive, a "street" free agent who didn't play in any regular-season game dressed as an emergency corner. So why didn't Dallas press the Blue Men Group secondary with five-wide formations? The Cowboys went five-wide on just five snaps, otherwise staying with their regular offense. This was a huge missed opportunity. For its part, Seattle faced a Cowboys' defense that had been shredded in December by New Orleans, Philadelphia and Detroit – all used multiple shifts and men in motion to confuse Dallas about where to line up. Yet the Seahawks too stayed with their regular offense, employing only a handful of multiple shifts. Doesn't anyone watch game film anymore?

Seattle's offensive line, its strength in the team's 2005 Super Bowl year, looked average – the loss of LG Steve Hutchinson to Minnesota has caused LT Walter Jones to play merely well, not great. In 2005, the Hawks were unstoppable running Shaun Alexander left behind Jones and Hutchinson. Saturday, trailing 20-13, with first-and-goal on the Dallas 1, Seattle tossed left to Alexander, and he lost 7 yards. The line did rally at the end, however. After Romo's botched hold, the announcers spoke of the game as over – but the situation was Seattle leading by one point, ball on its own 2, Dallas holding all its timeouts with 1:14 remaining. A safety wins it for Dallas; three stops and three timeouts puts the Cowboys in position for a winning field goal after the punt. The game was far from over after the botched hold! Then Alexander ran up the middle to the 22 behind fabulous blocking, and the game really was over.

Dallas' special teams might have lost the game, but on the kickoff return touchdown by Miles Austin, all four Cowboys wedge players for an instant managed to hold hands as they formed the wedge, exactly like you're supposed to! Now explain to me why Roy Williams is in the Pro Bowl. On the first Jerramy Stevens touchdown reception, Williams had single coverage on the Seattle tight end and was toasted – and Stevens is not exactly John Mackey in his prime. On the second Stevens touchdown, providing the winning points, Williams was way out of position. That second Stevens catch was a sweet call. Score Dallas 20, Seattle 15, Seahawks' ball on the Cowboys' 37 with four minutes remaining, Mike Holmgren called a goal-line set and a short seam turn-in to Stevens, as you might call at the goal line. Dallas obligingly put the middle linebacker on Stevens as if it really was the goal line, and the play went the distance. Coach Holmgren – last year in the Super Bowl you didn't play the multitalented Seneca Wallace at wide receiver, saving him for, well, what exactly? In this game, with receiver injuries, you started Wallace at receiver; he caught a pass on the first Seahawks' down; then he came out for the rest of the contest. Saving him for, well, what exactly?

Tuesday Morning Quarterback has done not one, not two but three items this season on the strange tendency of Dallas coaches to call sideways passes at the goal line. Three times this season, Dallas has been at the opposition goal line and coaches have called a quick out or other sideways pass that travels parallel to the goal line, three times resulting in big interceptions. How fitting that a sideways pass at the goal line started the chain of calamities that undid the Dallas season. The Cowboys had just completed their goal-line stand, holding Seattle scoreless after it attained first-and-goal at the 1. Dallas leads 20-13 and has the ball on its 2 with seven minutes remaining. The call is a sideway pass – the hitch to Terry Glenn. Fumble, safety and Dallas must kick off; Seattle scores the winning points following the safety free kick.

**A. Richard Newton, 1951-2007:** Last week I opened the newspaper and found an obituary for [Rich Newton](#), dean of engineering at the University of California at Berkeley and one of the underappreciated figures in the making of Silicon Valley. Newton died young at 55, of cancer. Just a couple months ago I was sitting in Newton's office, interviewing him for my next book, which is about the role of ideas in economic growth. Through hours of talk he said nothing about being sick, and at the end of the interview, was kind enough to guide me back to the freeway through Berkeley's famously confusing streets. Newton mentored a generation of engineering students, was renowned for taking under his wing the kids with the most improbable, blue-sky ideas. He had many achievements, most important a key role in developing "electronic design automation" – which allows software to plan the surfaces of chips, rather than having people shape these incredibly complex structures. One reason cheap, effective chips have in the past five years proliferated in cell phones, video games, car dashboards and many other places is that electronic design automation dramatically lowered the cost of creating chips tailored to specific applications. Newton had many opportunities to leave academia and become wealthy, but stayed because he enjoyed the creative ferment of college. "To start from nothing and create an idea that ends up improving people's lives, it's just *fun*, the most fun in the world," Newton told me. And now he's gone, without ever being celebrated like so many Silicon Valley celebrities. Memento mori: in Latin, remember that you too will die.

**Saban Points Part 1:** TMQ's law of job-hopping coaches holds: When you hire a coach who's only in it for himself, you get a coach who's only in it for himself. Of all schools, Alabama should know this. In 2002, the Tide hired Mike Price away from Washington State, even as Washington State was preparing for a bowl game. That is, Alabama hired the kind of person who would walk out on his previous commitments. We all remember the fiasco that followed. Now Alabama has signed Nick Saban away from Miami, Saban walking out on his Miami commitments just two years after arriving, and just two weeks after publicly vowing he would not leave. Hall of Famer Don Shula called Saban a "liar" and a "quitter," and that was sugarcoating it! Saban walked out on LSU, then walked out on the Dolphins – once again the Tide places the mantle of Bear Bryant upon the kind of person who does not honor his commitments. What would the Bear, a man of honor, think to know the University of Alabama now hires the kind of people who break promises? TMQ predicts another Alabama fiasco. Potential Alabama recruits, bear in mind: If Saban repeatedly lied at Miami, what makes you think he will hesitate to lie to you? At least in hiring a coach who doesn't keep his word, Alabama gets someone who is a perfect fit for its program.

**Saban Points Part 2:** Little Nicky – Saban is short – sure came up little in the slimy way he hauled out of Miami. The fact that he left was not a problem in contract terms. His contract allowed him to return to college coaching; this was a provision Marine Mammals owner Wayne Huizenga offered Saban two years ago in order to help entice him to walk out on LSU. So Huizenga knew he was

getting the kind of guy who walks out, and in doing so Saban was only exercising a contractual right. It's the way Saban walked out that makes him a sleaze.

Saban repeatedly lied about interest in the Alabama job even as his agent was negotiating with the school. And sorry Jason Taylor, "everybody does it" does not justify such deceit. Coaches in big-deal sports are paid huge sums of money in a world of poverty and want, and one rationalization for their pay is that they are supposed to set good examples for the young. What kind of example did Saban set by repeatedly lying in public? At the news conferences where he lied, Saban belittled reporters who tried to call him out. As former Dolphins coach Jimmy Johnson noted, only people of low character belittle those who earn substantially less than they do. Little Nicky has a longstanding reputation of being nasty to secretaries, office assistants and others beneath his station – he's the coaching equivalent of the Meryl Streep character in "The Devil Wears Prada." And Saban was classless with his assistants. He used a speakerphone call to tell the assistant coaches he was walking out on them, lacking the courtesy, or the guts, to look them in their eyes. (Alternatively, maybe Saban feared telling his assistants in person and seeing their expressions of delight.) He informed his players he was walking out on them via e-mail. Something to think about, potential Alabama recruits – if Nick Saban decides it serves his purposes to screw you, he won't even have the manliness to say it to your face. But check your e-mail!

**Saban Points Part 3:** Little Nicky follows Steve Spurrier as big-deal college coaches who came to the NFL expecting championships and praise, and soon retreated to the college ranks. One thing going on here is that it's much harder to win at the NFL level than at the football-factory level. Football-factory colleges have such incredible recruiting advantages that they often take the field with two or three times as much talent as the opponent, and it's easy to look like a genius coach if your guys are far more talented. In the NFL, the talent contrast between a division winner and the division's last-place team is surprisingly small. Football-factory schedules are rigged with cupcakes, insuring even an orangutan could coach a big-deal college team to several annual wins. In the NFL there are losing teams but no cupcake teams; San Diego had to work hard to beat the Oakland Raiders, this year's worst NFL team. At the football-factory level, coaches are treated like little gods, while press coverage is adulatory; at the NFL level, coaches are under constant criticism, and the media knives are always out. One reason football-factory college coaches seem like little gods is that their advantages in recruiting and cupcake opponents allow them to have several 30-point victories every season, whereas in the NFL, even the best coaches are relieved to beat the Raiders by a touchdown. Runaway victory margins in college help coaches seem like geniuses, while the close margins of most NFL games mean even winning coaches face criticism.

You can't blame Saban and Spurrier for wanting to retreat from a life of criticism to a life on being treated like little gods. The very morning last week that Saban decided to walk out on Miami, he boarded a private jet for Alabama, where he was received by a worshipful throng as if he were Dwight Eisenhower returning from the defeat of Germany. Saban simply left his Miami problems behind, not even bothering to say goodbye to the assistants and players who depended on him. If you're a little god, you go where the worshippers are.

**Bobby Petrino Footnote:** So why is Petrino going in the opposite direction – away from splendor at Louisville toward the long knives of the NFL and the Atlanta Falcons? He seems the latest instance of the coach who knows the ultimate test of the NFL, for whom everything has gone smoothly so far at a football factory, and who believes he will pass the NFL ultimate test. Good luck, Bobby. Note Saban, Spurrier, Butch Davis, Dennis Erickson – the Giants are the sole NFL team with a former football-factory head coach, and Tom Coughlin's tenure has not been a moonlit stroll in Central Park. Athletic director Tom Jurich and Petrino did a fabulous job of taking

Louisville from also-ran to a powerhouse that went 41-9 in the past four years and just won the FedEx Orange Bowl. But though Petrino has a strong track record, there's some thinking that Jurich was the brains of the operation. Atlanta is likely to chew Petrino up and spit him out: TMQ says two years from now Petrino will be begging his agent to find another job as agreeable as Louisville. And bear in mind that last August after interviewing for several openings, Petrino signed what was announced as a "10-year" contract to stay in Kentucky, then recruited by promising prospects that he would stay for the long haul. Michael Vick: If Petrino lied at Louisville, what makes you think he will hesitate to lie to you?

**Tuesday Morning Quarterback Player of the Year:** As excitement builds to see who will be named to the TMQ All-Unwanted All-Pros and who will win the prestigious Tuesday Morning Quarterback Non-QB Non-RB NFL MVP, let me tide you over with my Player of the Year: Brian "Smash" Williams, tailback, Dillon Panthers. Williams, played on "Friday Night Lights" by actor Gaius Charles, has scored the winning touchdown on the final play of all but one Panthers game this season. And still the plot has Williams fretting about whether he will be recruited for college ball! As TMQ has noted, "Friday Night Lights" is a fantastic show – one of the best-made television series ever, and you don't need to be obsessed with football to appreciate its quietly sensitive depiction of the pressures of contemporary family life. "Friday Night Lights" is that rare television show that causes you to know more about the world by watching, rather than less. Come on NBC: Sway to the left, sway to the right, renew another season for "Friday Night Lights!"

But since the show is about high school, it's starting to drive me crazy that we don't know what class year the characters are. Injured star quarterback Jason Street (actor Scott Porter), super-cheerleader Lyla Garrity (actress Minka Kelly), downtrodden nice guy Matt Saracen (Zach Gilford), bad girl Tyra Collette (Adrienne Palicki) and bad boy Tim Riggins (Taylor Kitsch) – are they juniors? Seniors? Graduate students? Saracen, Riggins, Tyra and Smash have cars, which seems pretty senior-like. Of course, all the performers are in their mid-20s – physically all look like they already have American Express cards. But class year is hugely important to high school life, and to locating the characters' travails in the spectrum of growing up. Surely producers are fudging the characters' class years because they don't know how many seasons "Friday Night Lights" will present. As of last Wednesday's episode, the Panthers are "one victory away from making the playoffs," and the Texas 5A football bracket requires four victories to win the state championship. That means the Dillon Panthers will play five more games on NBC this spring, leading up to the inevitable pressure-packed state championship episode. If the series concludes this spring, it must end with Dillon winning the championship (they will *not* be stopped one yard short like in the movie), Street having his "rise and walk" moment and everyone graduating. But if the show is renewed, they can't graduate!

Coaching note: "Friday Night Lights" is realistic in that although Coach Taylor is revered by his town, in private he does not seem especially gifted. In one episode Smash, the team's star, has a terrible first half because he's nervous about a college recruiter being at the game. What does Coach Taylor do at halftime? Scream at Smash. A skilled motivator would take a player in this situation aside and say, "Forget the first half, it never happened. We will never talk about it and never watch film of it. Clear your mind and be yourself. We loved you before this game started, and no matter how you play in the second half, we will love you when the game is over." My guess is that in Coach Taylor's situation from this episode, the overwhelming majority of highly paid coaches would simply yell at the player. Many highly paid coaches know amazingly little about managing human psychology.

Texas note: You can buy sharp-looking school gear of the actual Texas state champions, Southlake Carroll, [here](#). In Texas the high schools not only have 15,000-seat stadia – they have Web sites to sell you school hats and tees! And I'll bet they ship overseas. So why can't a Southlake Carroll hat be the trendiest thing to wear in Tokyo? Southlake Carroll finished the 2006 season ranked No. 1 nationally in the USA Today [high school poll](#). Note that Hoover High of Alabama, featured in the MTV series "Two-A-Days," failed to make the national top 25 because Hoover finished "only" 13-2. That's 15 games! There are high school teams in the USA Today top 25 that played 16 games, just like an NFL club. In Maryland, my state, the max a high school team can play is 14 games, which itself seems too many. The rush to make high school football more like college and the pros includes increasing the number of games played. Where will it stop?

**Jersey/A at Philadelphia Analysis:** Yes, it seems from the stat sheet as if Philadelphia coaches actually called as many rushes as passes – 31 of each. But there were two sacks and four scrambles by Jeff Garcia, meaning Philadelphia called 37 passing plays and 27 rushing. Still, in a bad-weather game the Nesharim gained more yards running than passing – the football gods will smile on that. The big run, Brian Westbrook's end around for a 49-yard touchdown, was led by a perfect pull block by center Jamaal Jackson. When your center gets out to lead the play wide, good things will happen.

Jersey/A started with a quick touchdown, then held the hosts three consecutive times and started possessions on the Eagles' 49, the Giants' 48 and the Eagles' 46. Result? No points. You can fail to capitalize on good field position once, even twice in a game. When the Giants failed to capitalize on three straight excellent drive starts, it was a wonder they were still close at the end. The play that should haunt G-Persons fans in the offseason came on the first snap of the fourth quarter. Philadelphia 20, Jersey/A 10, the Giants had third-and-2 on the Philadelphia 6. Had the Giants gotten a touchdown, the endgame would have been very different. Third-and-2, and Jersey/A rushed for an average of 4.9 yards on the day, so did Kevin Gilbride of the Giants call a rush? Pass incomplete, short field goal. When Tom "Mr. Personality" Coughlin gave the playcalling duties to Gilbride before the Giants' regular-season finale, a big win over Washington, the sports press praised this as a brilliant move. But the Redskins have one of the league's worst defenses. Against a good defense at Philadelphia, Gilbride's playcalling did not seem much better than might have been offered by a volunteer from the audience. Coaching note: When Eli Manning threw an interception, Gilbride responded by yelling at him. A skilled coach would calmly have said, "Here's what you did wrong and here's how to avoid repeating that mistake."

Blitz-happy Eagles defensive coordinator Jim Johnson resisted the urge most of the contest – but you knew it wouldn't last. Philadelphia 20, Jersey/A 13 with 6 minutes remaining, the Giants faced second-and-30, Eli Manning having to that point thrown for a modest 116 yards. Seven-man blitz on second down, six-man blitz on third down – suddenly the Giants have first down, and score to tie on the following snap. It's second-and-30 in the rain, just play straight defense!

**Stop Me Before I Blitz Again No. 1:** The Chiefs opened in conventional defense, and NBC announcer Cris Collinsworth kept urging them to blitz. Eventually Chiefs coaches started calling blitzes, and the results were: a Kansas City interception, a Kansas City sack, Peyton Manning's only touchdown pass, Indianapolis' two longest completions of the game. That is – the Kansas City blitz generated most of the exciting plays of the game, an equal number positive and negative from the Flintstones' standpoint. Television announcers extol the blitz, in part because they don't know the statistics about its probability of backfiring, in part because television announcers want exciting plays. And the blitz does generate exciting plays, it's just that a large number are negative for the defense. When you blitz only occasionally, on the other hand, the blitz can be devastating.

Indianapolis blitzes less than any team in the NFL, and had only blitzed Kansas City twice on the game when the Chiefs faced third-and-8, trailing 23-8, with 6:35 remaining. The Colts sent six, Kansas City seemed surprised, Trent Green heave-hoed for the interception that was the "game over" moment.

**Stop Me Before I Blitz Again No. 2:** Seattle has just staged its wild rally to take a 21-20 lead over Dallas. The Cowboys face second-and-7 at their 42. The Qrowdy Field crowd is making deafening noise. Tony Romo has looked shaky all the second half, as Dallas has scored only three points on offense. The odds seem to favor the defense – instead it's a six-blitz, 12-yard completion into Seahawks' territory. The next snap is a seven-man blitz, and as TMQ often notes, the seven-man blitz is like handing out engraved invitations for the offense to make a big play. Julius Jones sprints 35 yards past the blitzers to the Seattle 11, and it seems now nothing can save the home team. After the 35-yard run, Al Michaels and John Madden declared the long gain had happened because Seattle lined up its free safety too deep. Neither mentioned the all-out blitz. Because announcers extol blitzing, when a blitz backfires, announcers always say nothing. And why did Seattle line up its free safety so deep? Because seven were blitzing.

**News From Space:** TMQ regularly notes developments in the study of gamma-ray bursts, the puzzling phenomena from deep space. Gamma-ray bursts, usually a few seconds long, are extremely powerful blasts of energy whose origin is unknown. Since the discovery of gamma-ray bursts in the 1960s, astronomers studying them have assumed these energy blasts have a natural origin. TMQ asks, what if they are the muzzle flashes of cataclysmic weapons being used in distant combat? Recently, cosmologists have speculated that gamma-ray bursts must be associated with supernovas. But this summer researchers led by Johan Fynbo, a Danish astronomer, observed two gamma-ray bursts that were not followed by a supernova explosion. One of the bursts lasted 102 seconds, and current theories of how stars explode hold that any gamma release associated with a supernova could last only an instant. Fynbo said his discovery "represents a whole new category of gamma-ray bursts" that cannot be explained in terms of supernovas. Whatever's producing these strange events is very far away in cosmic terms. Let's hope it stays that way. Note: Fynbo works at the [Dark Cosmology Centre](#) at the University of Copenhagen, which is devoted to locating the 95 percent of the universe that's missing.

**Kansas City at Indianapolis Analysis:** Indianapolis, its rush defense known to be weak, opened with two middle linebackers on the field and the safeties up; Kansas City played directly into the hands of this strategy by opening with two tight ends and running straight into the middle. The result was no Kansas City first down until the third quarter, at 6:32 p.m. ET. It wasn't until late in the third quarter when Kansas City adjusted by throwing to the tight ends, who were covered by middle linebackers in the Colts' unusual scheme. Immediately, Kansas City moved for a touchdown and, immediately, Indianapolis coaches switched back to standard linebacker sets. Not often does one game plan clearly trump another; in this case it did.

Also, it did not help that the Chiefs played like they'd been out late the night before. Indianapolis 6, Kansas City 0 in the second quarter, just after an interception that should have fired the Chiefs up. First down, dropped pass. Second down, rush for eight. Third down, dropped pass. Fourth down, punt on fourth-and-2. The Kansas City offensive line, the league's best for several seasons, had a sluggish outing. A first-half sack of Trent Green, on a third-and-5, came with Indianapolis in a three-man rush; Dwight Freeney blew past Jordan Black using the "flatten" move perfected by Bruce Smith. (You charge ahead with your chest so low you look flat; only the best pass rushers can do this physically demanding move.) Indianapolis leading 23-8 with 6 minutes remaining, the Colts recorded a sack, then a sack and a fumble recovered. On each snap Indianapolis had four rushing

five, and at least one Kansas City offensive lineman was simply standing there doing nothing at all as his quarterback went down. Yuch.

On defense, Kansas City had its safeties deep to prevent long completions, so Peyton Manning endlessly threw under. Endlessly throwing under is not thrilling to watch, but works against a soft zone. One of Big Brother's interceptions was just a bad pass. The other two were all but identical. On both, at the line Manning signaling a "sight adjustment" – an unspoken audible where the receiver and quarterback switch the call based on what they see. On both plays, Manning wanted Marvin Harrison to cut out; both times Harrison cut in while Manning threw out, resulting in two interceptions to Ty Law who was just standing there. Since both mistakes were sight adjustments – that is, uncalled plays – this should be correctable. But you still wonder about Manning's annual postseason swoon. In the regular season, Manning's career touchdown-passes-to-interceptions ratio is nearly 2:1 – 275 touchdown passes to 159 interceptions. In his postseason career, Manning has thrown 16 touchdowns and 11 interceptions. It's not in your mind that his passing efficiency declines in the playoffs.

**Reader Animadversion:** Got a complaint or a deeply held grievance? Write me at [TMQ\\_ESPN@yahoo.com](mailto:TMQ_ESPN@yahoo.com). Include your real name and the name of your hometown, and I may quote you by name unless you instruct me otherwise. Note: giving your hometown improves your odds of being quoted.

**Next Week:** Coach Taylor of "Friday Night Lights" takes Eli Manning aside and yells at him.

**Wednesday, January 10, 2007**

TMQ Nation fires back

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By Gregg Easterbrook

What are the class years of the "Friday Night Lights" characters? **Dan Lynch of Simsbury, Conn.** reports, "Smash Williams is a junior -- this was noted in the episode about the college scout. Matt Saracen is a sophomore, noted in the pilot. Jason Street is presumably a senior as Tami Taylor, the guidance counselor, just described him as needing one credit to graduate." **Avi Pimplaskar of Arlington, Va.** adds that plot clues have made Tim Riggins and Tyra Collette appear to be seniors while Lyla Garrity appears to be a junior. He continues, "If 'Friday Night Lights' is renewed for another season and producers don't want to lose the characters, they could do what '90210' did. In the first season of '90210,' the entire gang was juniors except one character. After they finished that season, they had about 10 summer episodes before starting the next school year. In the next school year -- they were juniors again! Then the following season, the entire gang became seniors. So it took three years for the juniors of '90210' to graduate. Wouldn't be a stretch for 'Friday Night Lights' to do the same." Also I said the Dillon Panthers play five more games on NBC this spring because the most recent episode described them as having one more regular season game, and you know they will play four to reach the Texas state championship. **Phil Audet of Austin, Texas** reports that the Texas 5A bracket invites 64 teams, meaning the champion and runner-up appear in [six postseason games](#). The Texas 5A regular season is 10 contests, so the state champion and runner-up play 16 games -- the same number of games as the NFL regular season. It's possible to win 15 games in Texas high school football and *not* be a champion.

**Daniel Judge of Niceville, Fla.** asks, "Can we please stop the use of the phrase 'hook and ladder' to describe the play Boise State ran against Oklahoma? It's the hook-and-lateral. The wide receiver runs a hook, then laterals to another WR or running back. Please help remind the media." A hook-and-ladder is a fire truck, not a football play! **Charlaine Rexel of Miami** asks, "Do we need to say 'trick play' at all? Nearly all football tactics involve some deception, and trick plays are perfectly within the rule structure." I think it's a useful figure of speech -- we need a label, and "unusual plays" or "anomalous plays" doesn't sound right. My question is always, why don't coaches call more trick plays? Many pro and college teams only use one or two per season; you should call one or two trick plays every game. Some trick plays result in no gain or a turnover -- but this is true of all types of plays. Backs to the wall, Boise State called three trick plays in rapid succession, and pulled out an improbable win. Most coaches seem to think that more than one trick play in a blue moon isn't manly. Trick plays are effective, and it's manly to be effective!

**Bernardo Lopez of Mexico City** writes, "Once you toyed with a preseason prediction of forecasting every team ending its season 8-8. This year eight teams did end 8-8, so I suggest that predicting every single team will end up 8-8 next year. I bet no sport forecaster predicted eight records of NFL teams this year exactly correctly."

**Sean Sutton of Ypsilanti, Mich.** writes, "Regarding coaches' pay, I find it interesting that when hired to be the football coach of the United States Military Academy at West Point, Bobby Ross became the highest-paid federal governmental employee."

**Katie Tedder of Tahlequah, Okla.** wonders why Herm Edwards did not lift Trent Green for Damon Huard as Kansas City sputtered against Indianapolis. Edwards' philosophy seems to be

never to react during a game, no matter how well or poorly things are going; when I say coaches are overhyped, I sure don't mean there is not good coaching and bad coaching.

**Jamie Marx of St. Louis** writes, "On New Year's Eve in the MPC Computers Bowl, Nevada scored a touchdown with 3:46 remaining in the first half to take an 8-7 lead over Miami. When the Wolf Pack lined up to go for the 2-point conversion, I said: 'If they miss this and wind up losing by 1, it should be in TMQ.' Needless to say, Nevada failed to convert and went on to lose 21-20. Alas, never mentioned in TMQ." Now it is!

**Evan Wilson** points out, "The botched hold that killed the Cowboys' playoff game made me wonder if the following scenario would work: After the botched hold, every Dallas player should immediately have done whatever was necessary to get Tony Romo into the end zone regardless of whether it was legal -- that is, all Dallas' players should have grabbed and held the nearest Seahawk. If Romo gets into the end zone or gets the first down, then the Seahawks must take the penalty. That makes it fourth down again for Dallas. Since NFL policy is to only mark off one penalty, it doesn't matter if every Cowboy tackled his Seattle opponent. Only one penalty is marked off, meaning it's still a relatively short kick. If Romo doesn't get the touchdown or first down, then the Cowboys have failed anyway, so there's no downside to the Cowboys trying it." Hmm -- Evan, actually I think what you describe would work. But what team would be prepared for this situation? Wilson continues, "Teams ought to have an emergency word for the situation, a word the kicker screams when a botched snap or hold occurs. This will tell everyone to mug the nearest opponent with the hope that the holder will be able to get a first down or get into the end zone, forcing the defense to take the penalty and allow a re-kick."

I wrote that the tragic murder of Broncos player Darrent Williams was a sad reminder that statistics warn that you are far more likely to be a victim of crime between midnight and dawn than at other times. Many readers wrote to note that Williams died at the age of 25 -- and single people in their 20s stay out to all hours, that's the way of young adulthood. **Jide Mbanefo of Washington, D.C.** adds these points: "What you've done, for intents and purposes, is blame the victim. Furthermore, your logic is flawed. Statistics do tell us a lot of things, but also can be manipulated to tell us several conflicting things, not all of which make sense. Saying that more violent crime occurs late at night is all well and good. Concluding that violent crime rates between midnight and dawn mean that everyone should be camped out in our homes during those hours makes no sense. Do such statistics take into account who falls victim to violent crime in the first place? How many crimes are committed against people in their homes during the late-night period? Don't many late-night crimes involve drug or gang activity -- something your average person is never involved in? How many late-night crimes depend on location? The fatality rate for automobile accidents on freeways is higher than for local-road accidents; this does not mean we should all refuse to drive on highways. Most automobile accidents happen within a few miles of home. Should we thus not drive near our homes? Should we push our cars four miles from home before we get behind the wheel? I'm in my late-20s, and 95 percent of my friends go out past midnight at least once a week. From the way you make it sound, we are all lucky to have made it to the age of 30."

**Darin Hauser** notes a trend: "The best finish of Bill Parcells' teams are as follows: Giants -- Two Super Bowl wins; Patriots -- Lost Super Bowl; Jets -- Lost Conference Championship; Cowboys -- No playoff wins." Pretty clearly declining performance. And Parcells' salary has risen as his performance has declined -- just like a CEO!

Finally many readers seconded Urban Meyer in bemoaning the lack of a playoff system for Division I-A football. It doesn't have to include 64 teams like in Texas high school! **Melanie Hernandez of Santa Fe, N.M.** notes, "If the plus-one format existed, think of the fun we'd have had on Tuesday as

everyone argued whether Florida should play for the national championship against USC, LSU or Boise State." Actually, that argument means no matter which of the three was chosen, there would still be no consensus. And the argument would not have happened the morning after Florida's win -- if a plus-one format existed, the team destined to play the winner of Ohio State-Florida would need to have been chosen well in advance of that game, so the team in question did not disband. Then there would have been complaints that the plus-one team, chosen in advance, had an edge because it had extra time to rest and prepare. OK, then suppose there was a four-team post-bowls playoff. Florida and Boise State would be consensus choices, but four teams (USC, LSU, Wisconsin and Ohio State) could lay roughly equal claims to the other two slots. Make it an eight-team playoff field, and you have college football continuing till February. Sadly I think there can either be playoffs or the bowl system, not both. A playoff bracket would produce an undisputed champion, but the bowl format is fun and creates endless fodder for offseason yakking about who was slighted. Do we really need to be certain who the big-college champion is? It's only a game. (Sorry, Commissioner Goodell, I will report to the re-education camp immediately.)

**Monday, January 15, 2007**

**Updated: January 21, 3:35 PM ET**

Announcers are dropping the ball

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By Gregg Easterbrook

Everyone was saying the real Super Bowl would be Baltimore at San Diego in the AFC Championship Game, then both teams honked out despite the bye-week advantage, the home-field advantage (they were a combined 15-1 at home this season) and the nearly-naked-cheerleaders advantage. The Indianapolis and New England players beat the Baltimore and San Diego players by small margins; Tony Dungy and Bill Belichick outcoached Brian Billick and Marty Schottenheimer by historically huge margins. In the fourth quarters, Billick and Schottenheimer looked like novice coaches in over their heads at a youth-league contest. In fact, in the fourth quarter Schottenheimer forgot something important that youth-league coaches reliably remember! (See below.)

But first: Television announcers, will you please stop saying, "It was almost intercepted" whenever a defender barely touches the ball?

"That was nearly picked off by Chicago's Chris Harris!" proclaimed Joe Buck of Fox during the Seahawks-Bears game -- about a pass that bounced off a defender who was falling down out of bounds. (And when Fox cuts to a view of its football announcers, why do we see them *facing away from the field*? Maybe this explains a lot of the coverage.) During the Colts at Ravens collision, Dan Dierdorf of CBS gravely intoned, "This is the second Peyton Manning pass that should have been intercepted, both were sure picks." You go catch that "sure" pick! Calling the Eagles at Saints game on Fox, Dick Stockton decreed, "Josh Bullocks of the Saints just dropped two consecutive interceptions." On both, Bullocks barely got his hands on the ball. During the Bolts-Patriots game, Jim Nantz of CBS proclaimed after a pass bounced away from a defender's chest, "It should have been picked off, that was an easy catch." As Han Solo said to Princess Leia following their escape from the Death Star, "Easy! You call that easy?"

Ninety percent of the time when an announcer says a pass "should" have been picked off, the ball barely grazed a leaping defender's hands, or the defender was falling down or going out of bounds. Announcers, of course, constantly yak about what might have happened -- "If he hadn't been tackled, he could have gone all the way!" But often declaring passes "should" have been intercepted shows a lack of knowledge about the sport, since a defender is much more likely to drop a pass than a receiver. First, the receiver knows when and where to expect the ball, while the defender does not. Second, receivers have more experience catching passes -- I wince when some announcer declares that a linebacker "should" have caught a pass he was barely able to get his fingertips on. Third, many almost-interceptions have been tipped and are wobbling as they reach the defender. Finally, there's a difference in physics. Offensive players are usually moving away from the quarterback when a pass arrives, while defenders are usually moving toward the quarterback. The zip on the ball increases if you are moving in the direction of the passer; it's simply harder to catch a pass when you cut in front of someone than when you are striding upfield. Think it's "easy" to make an NFL interception? Try running with your back toward the person with the ball, then suddenly turning around and running full speed in the direction of a pass delivered at NFL velocity. Perhaps half of possible interceptions are dropped, while only a small number of possible offensive receptions are dropped. There are reasons why this is universal across all teams.

In other football news, Tom Coughlin fired his offensive coordinator with a week left in the season, then fired his defensive coordinator a week after losing in the playoffs. Apparently everyone on the Giants' coaching staff is to blame for what happened this season except Tom Coughlin! Stated another way, the people Coughlin hired did a terrible, horrible, awful job -- but Coughlin did a fine job of supervising them! Mike "The Ultimate Leader" Shanahan just fired defensive coordinator Larry Coyer, who oversaw a defense that started this season by becoming the first in 64 years not to allow a touchdown over the first 11 quarters. But that was September! Obviously by December Coyer had become a total incompetent -- while Shanahan had not changed in any way and was not in any way responsible for the Broncos' failure to make the playoffs. Halfway through the season, Billick fired his offensive coordinator and took over play-calling duties; Billick patted himself on the back in public when the Ravens scored well in the next few games. On Saturday, Baltimore honked out of the postseason at home, scoring a meager six points against one of the NFL's weakest defenses. So Coach Billick, will you fire yourself? Something tells me Billick will pronounce himself not in any way responsible! All over the league this week, assistant coaches are being fired while head coaches give themselves another chance. Richard Nixon would understand the coaching dynamic of the modern NFL.

In other football news, it's only mid-January, this year's ring doesn't even know whose fingers it will go on, and already fans and sports Web sites including ESPN.com are obsessing about the draft. Why? Twenty-eight of 32 teams are down for the count; there is no next game to look forward to, so fans turn their attention to picking new players -- skipping the fact that few draftees have any impact in their rookie years. Meanwhile, Seattle held the mantle of TMQ's Single Worst Play of the Season So Far, then lost it, then worked this weekend to win it back. Well, "worked" is hardly the right word. (See below.)

In entertainment news, Prince will perform at halftime of the Super Bowl. This breaks the string of aging Brit acts, though sustaining the string of Super Bowl halftime performers whose best work was done before many current spectators were born. During the period he used a glyph as a name, the singer in question was called The Artist Formerly Known as Prince. Now that he once again goes by Prince, this makes him The Artist Formerly Known as The Artist Formerly Known as Prince.

**Stat of the Week No. 1:** Tom Brady is 12-1 as a playoff starter.

**Stat of the Week No. 2:** Brady has never won the Associated Press NFL MVP award, and he received no votes this year.

**Stat of the Week No. 3:** Philadelphia played at New Orleans twice this season; both games ended with the home team winning 27-24.

**Stat of the Week No. 4:** Peyton Manning, who has twice as many touchdown passes as interceptions in regular-season games, has 16 touchdown passes and 13 interceptions in the postseason.

**Stat of the Week No. 5:** Manning improved to 5-6 as a postseason starter.

**Stat of the Week No. 6:** With eight minutes remaining in the second quarter of the New England at San Diego game, the sixth quarter of AFC playoff action this weekend, the first AFC touchdown was scored.

**Stat of the Week No. 7:** Nate Kaeding has hit 25 of his last 27 field-goal attempts at home -- both misses coming in crucial situations late in playoff games.

**Stat of the Week No. 8:** Marty Schottenheimer now has a 5-13 playoff record, for a .278 winning percentage.

**Cheerleader of the Week:** Jon McDonald of Toms River, N.J., was among many readers who have suggested [Suzanne L. of the Baltimore Ravens](#), a cheer-babe whose team bio says her hobbies are "Complex analysis, dancing, Star Trek and Lord of the Rings, playing Everquest." Also according to her team bio, Suzanne L. has a bachelor's in mathematics. A beautiful, glamorous woman who likes football, science fiction and video games -- the dreamgirl of about 50 million guys!

**New England at San Diego Analysis:** So you're San Diego. You're overconfident because you spent the bye week telling yourself you are the 1966 Packers while Tom Brady and Bill Belichick are yesterday's news. Simultaneously you're nervous because Marty Schottenheimer cannot beat the Dillon Panthers in the playoffs. Now you've just seen the Patriots erase a 21-13 deficit to tie the game with 4:30 remaining. Why, exactly, do you decide to panic? The game is tied. You've got the ball with 4:30 remaining. You've got the league's best running back and the league's best offensive line. Belichick in this situation would relentlessly grind the clock, planning to kick the winning field goal with a few seconds left. So what did the Chargers do? Handed off to LaDainian Tomlinson for 5 yards -- then incompleting, incompleting, punt. Up to the point at which the Chargers panicked, Tomlinson and backup Michael Turner had combined for 26 carries for 147 yards, a 5.6-yard average. Run the ball and control the outcome! You're at home, where crowd energy helps the rushing game! Instead incompleting, incompleting, punt -- then watch New England dance at the center of your field.

The faces of the Chargers' players suggested they expected to win by 20 points, and when LaDainian Tomlinson scored to make it 21-13 with eight minutes to go, they decided to act as if they were ahead by 20 points. With eight minutes remaining, the Bolts were celebrating on the sidelines, and the clueless Schottenheimer did not tell them to get their heads back in the game. Schottenheimer was oblivious to the 16-ton weight about to be dropped on his head -- even though the opponent was the most efficient, unflappable team in NFL history! When New England's players saw some Chargers celebrating on the sidelines with eight minutes remaining as if it was already over, and realized the clueless Schottenheimer was oblivious, they smelled blood. I'll never forget the look on Michael Jordan's face when he saw Charles Barkley start to dance and clown around with a minute left in an NBA Finals game that Barkley thought Phoenix had already won. Jordan smelled blood, and a moment later the NBA crown was his.

Oh how well New England played down the stretch. Reaching second-and-1 on the San Diego 4 with about five minutes remaining, trailing by eight points, the Flying Elvii lined up "heavy," and the Bolts responded with a nine-man line. At that point New England had 47 yards rushing and had dropped back to pass on 17 consecutive snaps! Yet San Diego fell for the play fake. They've thrown on 17 consecutive snaps, why are you buying the play-fake? Now it's 21-19 and the visitors line up to go for two. Not only did New England successfully execute a high school play -- direct snap to the tailback as the quarterback jumps into the air to simulate a bad snap. Before the snap, Tom Brady was furiously pointing and gesturing to the wideouts on his left, as if audibling to a pass. The pointing and gesturing was all a ruse.

When the pressure is on, New England's tactical decisions are almost always right. The Pats played most of the first half with two tight ends, and trailed 14-3 at the two-minute warning of the second quarter. At that point, New England switched to three wide receivers, forcing San Diego to put nickel back Antonio Cromartie on the field. Cromartie may have been a first-round draft choice, but he started only one season at Florida State and often seems to have scant idea of where he should be on the field. Playing a little more than half the game, Cromartie recorded six tackles, most by any

San Diego defensive back -- and all came after his receiver caught a pass. From the point New England switched to multiple wides, the visitors outscored the home team 21-7. And as usual, the New England offensive line becomes invincible in the playoffs, surrendering only one sack after the Pats went three wide and opened up the edge to the boastful Shawne Merriman. His only "sack" was to stop a Brady scramble at the line of scrimmage.

I guess I don't need to mention that on what proved the decisive down for the Patriots (score tied, New England facing third-and-10 on its 34 with less than three minutes remaining, odds favoring a stop for the defense). San Diego blitzed, resulting in a 49-yard completion into field-goal range. A sharp quarterback like Brady *wants* to be blitzed on third-and-long! I ask anyone to explain why Schottenheimer decided to go for it on fourth-and-11 on the New England 30 when the game was scoreless, and a 47-yard field-goal attempt for Pro Bowler Nate Kaeding beckoned -- the play resulted in a lost fumble -- then decided to punt on fourth-and-4 from the New England 41 on the next possession. Fourth-and-11 in field-goal range, I'd kick. Fourth-and-4 on the 41, I'd go for it. Schottenheimer did a nice job of getting the percentages backward! I ask anyone to explain why Schottenheimer wasted a timeout by challenging a fourth-quarter fumble ruling, when the call was obviously correct. Imagine how different the endgame might have been if San Diego still held a timeout when it reached first-and-10 on the New England 36 with 24 seconds remaining.

And I ask anyone to explain where the San Diego coaching staff was with the Bolts leading 21-13 and New England facing fourth-and-5 with 6:25 remaining. Marlon McCree of San Diego intercepted the ball, then committed the aforementioned fumble. On fourth down you knock down the pass! Had McCree simply slapped the ball to the ground, the Bolts would have taken possession on their 41 with the clock winding down, the league's best running back and an eight-point lead.

On fourth down it is the responsibility of the coaching staff to remind defenders *not* to intercept! Before a key fourth down in our middle-school flag league this fall, I screamed to my players: "Knock it down! Do not intercept!" My 11-year-old, Spenser, had a perfect bead on a pick and instead slapped the ball to the ground. After the game he said, "Dad, I really wanted the interception, but I knew you knock it down on fourth down." Why didn't San Diego's professionals know this? Why didn't the highly paid San Diego coaches remind them? Before a fourth-down snap by the opponent, coaches are supposed to scream, "FOURTH DOWN! KNOCK IT DOWN!" Knocking the ball down on fourth down not only gives your team possession at the original line of scrimmage, which is usually a better spot than an interception spot, but prevents the intercept-then-fumble scenario. McCree said after the game that he made the pick because he thought he would score a touchdown -- another reason why defenders must be coached to knock it down on fourth down! Defenders always fantasize about touchdowns. McCree would have been lucky to get back to the original line of scrimmage. All San Diego had to do on this season-killer snap was exhibit a standard well-coached response to a favorable situation, and the Chargers might now be preparing to host the conference championship. Instead, San Diego screwed up something several of my 11-year-olds got right on several occasions this fall. And note that neither CBS announcer so much as noticed that slapping the ball down would have saved San Diego's day. Endlessly it amazes me that television football pundits who are well-paid to do nothing all year but yak about sports seem unaware of the basics of what's happening on the field.

As for New England, two months ago TMQ did an item on the fact that [productive receivers who sign big-money deals](#) to leave Foxborough immediately become average or nonentities (Deion Branch, David Patten, David Givens) while unwanted receivers who arrive at New England (Reche Caldwell) immediately become ballers. I speculated this had something to do with the male-modelesque Brady. Now Jabar Gaffney -- a nobody at Houston for years, 11 receptions in the

regular season in 2006 -- gets inserted into the Flying Elvii postseason lineup and so far has 18 catches in two outings.

**Expensive is Better -- at Least in the First Year:** Why did Atlanta give Bobby Petrino nearly \$5 million a season to become head coach, when the majority of recent football-factory coaches jumping to the NFL have exited with tails between their legs (Nick Saban, Steve Spurrier, Butch Davis, Dennis Erickson)? As TMQ notes annually at this time, NFL coaching vacancies come along much more often than football-factory vacancies -- the average head coach tenure in the NFL is about three years, more than 10 years at the football factories -- for marketing reasons. In the NFL, two-thirds of teams do not make the postseason, and thus two-thirds of fan bases end the season hopping mad; firing the head coach is the most practical, dramatic step an owner can take to give fans hope that next year will be different. In college, nearly every football factory makes a bowl game, so nearly every football factory can end the season claiming success. Because a college football factory season almost always ends in a bowl game, the ticket selling period -- most tickets are sold over the winter -- begins on a high note. Many NFL ticket selling periods begin on a low note, the team just having failed to make the playoffs. A high-profile coaching appointment kicks off the seat-selling campaign with a positive.

Even assuming Petrino becomes a successful NFL coach -- which is statistically unlikely -- he might add one, perhaps two victories to the total the Falcons could achieve next season. But he'll add tremendously to marketing. The Falcons traditionally have struggled to sell out the Georgia Dome. The last two years were good sales years owing to Michael Vick excitement, but then both years ended on bum notes. It was reasonable for the Falcons to expect trouble selling seats this offseason. Hiring Petrino should change that. If his name sells 5,000 seats per home game in 2007, that will bring in around \$2.5 million in ticket revenue and a roughly equal sum in parking and concession income. So Petrino is likely to pay for himself -- in the first season, at least. Subsequent years will depend on whether his aura remains or fades.

David Beckham note: his "\$250 million" deal to play in Los Angeles is actually "up to" that amount, depending on how the marketing goes. How long till it is common for star players and coaches to sign deals whose value is contingent on seat sales and tie-in income? Movie note: Beckham has a cameo in "[Goal II](#)," due soon, which costars the debonair hunk [Alessandro Nivola](#), son of my boss at the Brookings Institution.

**Seattle at Chicago Analysis:** TMQ has done a couple items on the decline of Walter Jones, who last year won the coveted "longest award in sports" -- the Tuesday Morning Quarterback Non-QB Non-RB NFL MVP -- but this year has had streaks of being average or even bad. Sunday, the score is tied, 24 seconds remain in regulation and the Seahawks have third-and-10 on the Chicago 45, holding a timeout. A 15-yard completion puts the Hawks in range for the kick to win. And ahem -- *it's a playoff game*, this down is not exactly chopped liver. The ball is snapped and the Bears rush only three; Tank Johnson records the sack that ends Seattle's chance to win while *Walter Jones just stands there watching*. Five Seahawks offensive linemen were available to block three rushers. As Matt Hasselbeck struggled to avoid the sack, Jones, guard Rob Sims and center Chris Spencer simply stood there watching, not blocking anyone or even attempting to block anyone. This was the Single Worst Play of the Season So Far.

Painful sequence for Hawks fans: Chicago ball, and Rex Grossman throws a 68-yard touchdown strike to Bernard Berrian, who runs the deep post with no safety in sight. Now it's three snaps later, and Matt Hasselbeck throws the deep post to Darrell Jackson. Brian Urlacher, the *middle linebacker*, is in position deep to break up the pass.

Game tied at the two-minute warning, Seattle faced fourth-and-1 on the Chicago 44 and made the right decision by going for it -- punting would have been ridiculous. Hasselbeck bobbled the snap, preventing the Seahawks from converting and going on to win. How has it gotten all the way to Tuesday and the sports-yak world seems not to have noticed that hard on the heels of winning a playoff game against Dallas when the Cowboys' quarterback bobbled a last-minute snap, the Seahawks' quarterback bobbled a last-minute snap? Surely the football gods chortled. In the final three minutes of regulation, Seattle snapped the ball in Chicago territory six times, and six times failed to get the extra few yards needed for the field-goal attempt to win. Blue Men Group fans, it just wasn't meant to be.

**The Future Will Occur at Some Point:** In my preseason preview of the NFC, I noted, "Sooner or later the Skins' profligate ways will catch up with them." Make that sooner. Washington faces a salary cap crash, plus had already traded away its second, third and fourth choices of the 2007 draft. The Redskins have even already traded away 2008 draft choices! Jason Campbell looked like the real deal at quarterback, but otherwise this team has serious needs and little cap space or draft ammunition. Last winter TMQ proposed that the best thing Chainsaw Dan Snyder could do during the 2006 offseason would be to lull on the beach of some private island, quaffing rum drinks with little parasols. Instead Snyder hung around Redskins Park and insisted the team release good players who went on to perform well elsewhere (Ryan Clark, Walt Harris, Robert Royal) while spending megabucks on glamour boys other teams wanted to get rid of (Adam Archuleta, Andre Carter, T.J. Duckett, Brandon Lloyd). The expensive glamour boys performed just as poorly in Washington as they had for their previous employers. How could Snyder possibly have anticipated that! To top it off, though the Redskins finished 2005 playing well on offense, Chainsaw Dan insisted the team toss out its entire offensive system and bring in a new system administered by a new guy with the nutty title "associate head coach." Now how could anyone possibly have anticipated this would trigger a poor offensive performance in 2006? Please Dan, in the 2007 offseason, park yourself on a secluded beach thousands of miles from our nation's capital, order drinks with parasols and leave the football to the people who know what they're doing.

**Mega-babe News:** The Air Force just suspended staff sergeant Michelle Manhart, who posed nude for the issue of Playboy now reaching newsstands. "This staff sergeant's alleged action does not meet the high standards we expect of our airmen," an Air Force spokesman told the Associated Press. Why say "alleged?" Open an issue, the proof is there. Plus it seems to me the Air Force having a sergeant good-looking enough to pose for Playboy does reflect "high standards."

**Philadelphia at New Orleans Analysis:** Oh no -- the Saints almost lose on the trendy flip! The "flip" play has gone from rare to standard this season, and leading 27-24 with three minutes remaining, ball on the Eagles' 32, New Orleans called the flip and fumbled it, Philadelphia recovering. Then the Saints forced the visiting team into fourth-and-15 from its 39-yard line, 1:56 remaining, Philadelphia holding two timeouts. You cannot under any circumstances even consider punting! Boom went the punt, and needless to say Philadelphia never touched the ball again. Sure, fourth-and-15 is a long down, but I seem to remember the Eagles' converting a fourth-and-26 in the playoffs. Anyway, it's do-or-die, you must go for it! With Philadelphia having only two timeouts, the best outcome for the punt was that New Orleans would be stopped on its possession and kick the ball back, giving Philadelphia roughly the same field position with one minute and no timeouts. This outcome assumes Philadelphia can stop New Orleans from gaining a clock-zeroing 10 yards in three tries, and to that point New Orleans had rushed for 5.7 yards per attempt. Of course, Philadelphia was not able to prevent those 10 yards. A fourth-and-15 try was more promising than a passive punt -- and then if you fail, you go down swinging.

Highlight of the game: Trailing 21-13, New Orleans faced first-and-goal on the Philadelphia 5. Deuce McAllister took the ball straight ahead and seemed stopped at the 2, but kept driving his legs for the touchdown. What made this play a highlight: *Every* player on the New Orleans side kept driving his legs. The Saints' offensive linemen did not simply shove their men and then stand up and look around, as highly paid NFL offensive linemen so often do. All New Orleans blockers kept driving the Eagles back until they heard the whistle. The football gods reward that sort of thing.

Lowlight of the game: Trailing 27-21, Philadelphia faced third-and-1 on the New Orleans 4 at the start of the fourth quarter. The Eagles rushed for 6.2 yards per carry in this game: just run the ball and the first down is likely. Instead, the Eagles pass, loss of yardage, field goal and the visitors never penetrated New Orleans territory again. Just run the ball! Especially since in this situation, any result except a loss of yardage and a fourth-down run is a high percentage play, too. TMQ has done numerous items on how the pass-wacky Andy Reid seems to think that only passing yardage counts. Down at the goal line in a game in which the Eagles rushed well, Reid didn't want a rushing touchdown, he wanted a passing touchdown -- the sports press treats passing success as evidence of coaching genius, while viewing rushing success as just bump-and-grind. Reid's tragic flaw, his desire for passing numbers, may have cost the Eagles a postseason win. This isn't important enough to call Greek tragedy. Maybe it rises to the level of Albanian tragedy.

**Porky Pig Isn't in the Commercial Because He Carries American Express:** The "where have I heard that before?" tune playing in a current Visa commercial -- food court meals being served in assembly-line fashion until someone pays with cash instead of with a Visa card -- is "Powerhouse" by the jazz composer Raymond Scott, who wrote the music in 1937. "Powerhouse" is among the most-quoted airs of modern music -- quoted in musical terms -- yet few can identify the composition's name. About industrial power and automation, "Powerhouse" became the theme music for Warner Bros. cartoons of World War II era, and has since been heard in *The Simpsons*, the film "Honey I Shrunk the Kids" and as theme music for Cartoon Network. Here is the main air in the [1937 version](#), and here another portion of the work often heard in [cartoon chase scenes](#). Scott, who died in 1994, composed a substantial body of jazz and helped develop the electronic synthesizer. You can [watch the Visa commercial here](#). Though it depicts short-order cooks flipping flapjacks, the spot is titled "Lunch."

Advertising note: OK, OK, I'll buy a Dodge Ram and drive it to Wendy's for the \$2.99 meal! Man am I sick of the Rock 'Em Sock 'Em Robots commercial and the Wendy's \$2.99 commercial, which during the NFL playoffs seemed to run more than all other advertising spots combined.

**Britney Gave Interviews to All Seven Authors, Saying "Like, Whatever" Seven Times:** TMQ dislikes the modern convention of listing multiple people as "authors" of a work written by a single person; this is part of the overall cheapening of the written word. Several previous items have concerned the absurd number of people listed as "authors" of scientific papers. For example, the lead paper in the current issue of *Science* magazine, "Draft Genome Sequence of the Sexually Transmitted Pathogen *Trichomonas Vaginalis*," lists 67 authors. (Yes I know science papers list those who only purport to have contributed to the research, but most names are there for reasons of bureaucratic credit-grabbing, and if the paper turns out wrong and must be withdrawn, about 65 of the 67 will claim they aren't responsible.) There's now a *New York Times* article devoted to mocking the fact that *People* magazine's latest Britney article lists seven authors. The [Times' own article](#) mocking multiple authors lists two authors! Anyway, it seems perfectly reasonable that seven people would be required to think of something new to say about Britney.

**Globalization Works in Both Directions:** Years ago, at a dinner party in Pakistan, I enjoyed a bowl of mango ice cream, and thought, "This mango craze will never get out of the subcontinent."

Good thing I didn't make a prediction! [Qibla Mango soda](#) is becoming the must-have drink in parts of the developing world. Qibla is an English transliteration of an Arabic term that means "to have direction in one's life." The company was founded in the United Kingdom; currently British Columbia is the only part of North America where Qibla drinks are sold. Now McDonald's has jumped on the bandwagon with a mango milkshake. How long until developing-world products and flavors become as common in the West as Western items are elsewhere?

**Indianapolis at Baltimore Analysis:** Brian Billick must be relieved that Indianapolis at Baltimore was the first game of the divisionals and New England at San Diego the last -- meaning when the weekend concluded, the sports world was focused on the collapse of the Bolts and the poor coaching job by Marty Schottenheimer. The collapse of the Ravens and the poor coaching job by Billick seemed as much a story. Baltimore entered at 13-3, having given up the fewest points in the league, and with plenty of motivation to defeat the team that abandoned Charm City in the dead of night 23 years ago. Instead, the Ravens got steam-cleaned. Baltimore had a poor game plan, performed listlessly and seemed to quit in the second half though trailing by only one score until the closing moments. Schottenheimer at least had his team ahead most of the way and in the game until the final snap. Billick never even had his team in the game.

Here's one of many examples of Billick's slipshod coaching. Trailing 9-3, Baltimore took possession on its 20 with 1:05 remaining in the first half, holding two timeouts. Billick had the Ravens run the ball into the line twice and then trot to the locker room, never calling the timeouts despite quickly gaining a first down. Huh? What? This is the playoffs, there is no tomorrow! Allow me to rephrase: Huh? What?

Ravens players gave a pitiful effort, quitting on play after play. With Indianapolis leading 3-0 in the first quarter, Todd Heap fumbled a short pass in the flat, just 3 yards downfield. As Heap and some Colts fought for the ball, *the entire Baltimore offensive line just stood and watched*. The fumble occurred a short distance from the Baltimore offensive linemen, and they stood doing nothing at all, as if posing for a group portrait, while Indianapolis recovered. Later, in the third quarter, the Ravens were backed up on their 5, and Steve McNair was being chased in the backfield. Baltimore center Mike Flynn not only did nothing at all to help McNair -- Flynn stood watching and *adjusting his elbow pad* as his quarterback was being hemmed in and slammed down. He's your quarterback, go protect him! Later, in the fourth quarter, Baltimore was within a touchdown of the lead when McNair heave-hoed toward receiver Demetrius Williams. The pass was a little short, and Williams *just stood there watching*, making no attempt to break up the interception that followed. One or two players might give poor effort, and have themselves to blame. When everyone on a team gives poor effort, the coaches are to blame.

The signature play of Baltimore's defense this season has been the overload blitz, in which two or even three come from the same area. Previously I speculated that the overload blitz, which works against inferior teams, would backfire against the savvy Peyton Manning. We'll never know, because the Ravens' defense played vanilla the entire way -- conventional 3-4 with little stunting or blitzing. Last January, Pittsburgh defeated Indianapolis in the postseason by coming into the game with a blitz-happy reputation, then playing straight defense. Maybe Baltimore coaches were trying to use that ploy. But Indianapolis coaches have now seen that game plan, and seemed ready for straight defense. When vanilla didn't work, Baltimore never adjusted. Though TMQ doesn't like constant unorthodox blitzing, this was what made Baltimore the league's best defense in the regular season. Dance with the one who brung ya!

On offense, Billick seemed to lose confidence in McNair after the quarterback threw an interception at the Indianapolis goal line in the second quarter. From then on the Ravens' offense went vanilla

too. Example: Early in the fourth quarter, the Nevermores faced third-and-18 on the Indianapolis 39, trailing 12-3. Billick, who was calling the plays, called a short dump pass to the blocking back; gain of 6, field goal, and Baltimore never scored again. McNair was 16 of 21 at that point; Baltimore desperately needed a touchdown both to draw within one score and to rev up the crowd. Yet Billick called a designed dump pass -- McNair never looked at anyone but the blocking back. If you've lost confidence in your quarterback, take him out! Put in Kyle Boller or Trent Dilfer or Tom Matte. Billick seemed to view victory as so automatic it barely even mattered if the offense scored.

Billick's poor coaching caused TMQ to write "game over" in his notebook as early as I ever have for a non-blowout. Indianapolis leading 12-3 midway through the third quarter, Billick ordered a punt on fourth-and-4 from the Colts' 41. Not only does the average NFL play gain about 5 yards: you're down by two scores in the second half in opposition territory *in the playoffs*. Why are you punting???????????? I scarcely need tell you it took Indianapolis just two snaps to pass the point where the ball would have been had Baltimore gone for it and missed. By going for it here, Billick could have kept a scoring drive alive and told his players he was challenging them to win the game. By launching a mincing fraidy-cat punt he told his players the coaches had quit on the game, so they might as well quit too. As Indianapolis quickly roared past the point of the Preposterous Punt, Dan Dierdorf solemnly intoned, "Brian Billick felt like he had a great chance to get his offense great field position" with a defensive stop. Billick's offense just *had* great field position, and passively surrendered the ball.

As for Indianapolis, you don't need to say much about a club whose defense holds the favored team without a touchdown on its home field, and whose offense stages a scoring drive that begins on its own 1-yard line against the league's leading defense. The Colts looked as ready as they'll ever be to break the Dungy-Manning Super Bowl jinx. My only small complaint: Twice in the fourth quarter, the Colts took possession with a six-point lead and instead of grinding the clock, tried to insert the misericord with play-fake passes. The passes resulted in an interception and a sack-then-punt, with hardly any time used. After gaining their third possession of the fourth quarter, still leading by six, the Colts finally ran -- rushes on 12 of 13 snaps, staging a classic clock-killing drive to seal the victory. Several times this year, Indianapolis has entered the fourth quarter leading and gone for the quick coup de grace rather than start working the clock. It's something to be aware of.

**Disclaimer of the Week:** Recently I used Columbia University's applications Web site to send a letter of recommendation for a former student who is applying to Columbia grad school. Before doing this, the user must click "I accept" to a 1,168-word disclaimer, much of which was in all-caps to discourage reading. Froth in the Columbia disclaimer included, "Access and use of the online recommendation is subject to all applicable federal, state and local laws." You don't need to click "I accept" to cause federal and state laws to apply. The law applies whether you want it to or not.

**Movie Disclaimer of the Week:** The disclaimer for the Cedric the Entertainer flick "Code Name: Cleaner" warns of "sexual content, crude humor and some violence." My guess is it should really warn, "crude sexuality, violent content and some humor."

**Coming Soon -- Drive-Through DNA:** "RheoSwitch -- precise, variable control of mammalian gene expression." Haven't you always dreamed of precise control of mammalian gene expression? Buy it [here](#). Hmmm, wonder if they will send me a free sample of this [pMYB5 control plasmid](#) so I can try manipulating a little *E. coli* at home. Welcome to the world of the gene-device ads in Science magazine, which has been taken over by advertising for genetic materials and gene-manipulation laboratory devices. All of the full-page ads in the front of the magazine in a recent issue were for such products. (Advertising in the front of a magazine costs more than in the middle.) "Ambion's MagMAX delivers high-quality RNA to maximize the success of your gene expression

studies," one ad says. "Achieve excellent transfection efficiency in some cell lines," a Roche ad promises. "One reagent convenience for DNA and RNAi transfection," an ad for Invitrogen proclaimed. "SpeedStar DNA Polymerase is a convenient, efficient DNA polymerase specifically designed for fast PCR," Takara Bio promised. I liked my polymerase convenient! "Enter the world of reliable gene silencing," Qiagen's ad headlined. "Our next generation of high-fidelity Pfu-based fusion enzymes sets a new standard for PCR performance," Stratagene's inside-cover ad proclaims. OK, medical laboratories need to shop for products just like everybody else does. What's spooky is that these are slick ad-agency ads with graphics and sell lines. "MessageAmp II -- Biotin Enhanced!" cries an ad for Ambion, whose Web site promises, "Scale up easily to acquire more RNA." The magazine ad for Ambion has flowers and looks for all the world like a prescription-drug sales pitch. "DNA Sequencing for \$2.50 per reaction," with "plasmid and PCR purification available" and "no charge for standard sequencing primers" proclaimed a recent ad in Science, while "Simplify Gene Silencing Experiments with Pre-Designed RNA -- Fast! Easy! Guaranteed!" declared another.

**Corporate Overlap Watch:** This season Cris Collinsworth called games on both NBC and on NFL Network, and you can't watch NFL Network without first turning off NBC, or vice versa. Peter King of Sports Illustrated appeared on NBC's Football Night show: Sports Illustrated is owned by Time Warner, which owns CNN and TNT, and you can't watch either without first turning off NBC. The NFL gains most of its revenue by selling rights to NBC, CBS, Fox and ESPN, which can't be profitable and thus pay the NFL unless people watch their shows, and you can't watch NFL Network without first turning off NBC, CBS, Fox or ESPN. You can watch any network using DirecTV, but to watch 99 percent of what's on DirecTV, first you must switch off Fox, which is owned by News Corporation, which owns DirecTV. I'm not sure where Verizon and Sprint figure into this, but I'm working on it.

**Reader Animadversion:** Got a complaint or a deeply held grievance? Write me at [TMQ\\_ESPN@yahoo.com](mailto:TMQ_ESPN@yahoo.com). Include your real name and the name of your hometown, and I may quote you by name unless you instruct me otherwise. Note: Giving your hometown improves your odds of being quoted.

**Next Week:** The Tuesday Morning Quarterback All-Unwanted All-Pros -- the NFL's best players who were undrafted, or waived, or both.

**Monday, January 22, 2007**

**Updated: February 5, 9:17 AM ET**

Enough talk about parity, please

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By Gregg Easterbrook

Scratch a sports nut and he or she will complain that parity plagues the post-salary-cap NFL. It isn't just the sports radio universe that claims this -- recently the New York Times, which styles itself the Paper of Record, has run two prominent articles complaining that NFL parity has changed everything for the worse. If everything really has changed for the worst, why are the NFL's ratings and attendance numbers at record levels? And supposing there is a shocking outbreak of parity, why would this be bad? Sports yakkers extol the old days of dynasties, but for every good team there must be a bad team. If most NFL teams are of roughly similar quality, we'd expect many close, exciting games -- which seems more interesting, and a better value for the spectator's dollar, than lots of boring blowouts that are over at halftime.

Anyway, parity is a myth. Up one side and down the other, a myth.

Let's take the parity complaints in turn. First, supposedly parity is proven by an outbreak of close games. "In an era of parity in the NFL, it seems that more and more games are being decided by field goals," the New York Times decried this Sunday, quoting Dick Vermeil saying "with parity the win margins are closer than ever before." In 2006, 45 percent of NFL games were decided by a touchdown or less, while 23 percent were decided by a field goal or less. A decade ago in 1996, 45 percent of NFL games were decided by a touchdown or less, while 20 percent were decided by a field goal or less. In 1986, when there was no salary cap, 47 percent of NFL games were decided by a touchdown or less, while 21 percent were decided by a field goal or less. In 1976 -- the Golden Era to parity complainers, the decade of the Steelers' dynasty -- 37 percent of games were decided by a touchdown or less, while 19 percent were by a field goal or less.

Figures for other years since the merger are similar. So during the 1970s, games were on average slightly less close than today. But for the past two decades, starting prior to the salary cap, there has been no meaningful year-to-year difference in the closeness of games. If you argue by scores, the most you can argue is that games of the 1970s were slightest less close than games in decades since -- and again, what's wrong with close games? The product being sold is, after all, entertainment. Anyway, project the close-games rate of 1976 onto the 2006 season and there would have been 10 fewer games, of 256 played, decided by a field goal or less. Some earthshaking trend.

Next on the list of parity myths is the claim that there are far more teams in the middle now than before. In 2006, 21 of the 32 teams (66 percent) finished in the middle at 6-10, 7-9, 8-8, 9-7 or 10-6 -- at .500 or two games above or below. In 1996, 20 of 30 teams (67 percent) finished at .500 or two games above or below. In 1986, 13 of 28 teams (46 percent) finished at .500 or two games above or below. (That year's number simplifies for two ties.) In 1978, the first year of 16-game slates, 17 of 28 teams (61 percent) finished at .500 or two games above or below, again simplifying for ties. Go back before the cap and there's just not that much variation in the percentage of middle finishers. Take 1981, for example -- 20 of 28 teams (71 percent) finished at .500 or two games above or below. In statistics, most things that can be measured finish in the middle. So we should not be surprised that most NFL teams finish in the middle.

Now compare the NFL to the NBA and MLB. The equivalent of finishing at .500 or two games above or below in the current National Basketball Association is to record between 31 and 51 wins. Last season, 20 of the 30 NBA teams fell into that band, 67 percent. The equivalent of finishing at

.500 or two games above or below in current Major League Baseball is to win between 61 and 101 games, and last year all MLB teams (100 percent) fell into that band. So in the NFL, which has a hard salary cap that always applies, 67 percent of teams fell in the middle; in the NBA, which has a soft salary cap that only sometimes applies, 67 percent of teams fell in the middle; in MLB, which has no salary cap, 100 percent of teams fell in the middle. Consider that for an MLB team to have finished last season with the equivalent of the 14-2 record compiled by the San Diego Chargers, it would have needed to win 142 games. The winningest MLB clubs of last season, the Mets and Yankees, put up 97 victories.

Finally there is the complaint that parity causes the teams that make the postseason to vary too much year to year. From 2005 to 2006, only five of 12 postseason teams repeated. From 1995 to 1996, six of 12 postseason teams repeated. From 1985 to 1986, eight of 10 postseason teams repeated. From 1975 to 1976, five of eight postseason teams repeated. In the past five seasons, an average of 5.4 teams have made the playoffs in successive years; during the Pittsburgh dynasty period, an average of 5.8 teams per season made the playoffs in successive years, and then four fewer got wild cards. So the variation in who makes the postseason has increased meaningfully, while scoring margins and middle-of-the-pack shares have not. More regular season games played and more wild-card slots offered should pretty neatly account for increased variation in who reaches the postseason, leaving the parity myth just that -- a myth.

In other news, if you think parity has ruined the NFL, how come the games keep being great? New England at Indianapolis, New England at San Diego and Dallas at Seattle were as exciting as football can get, while Jersey/A at Philadelphia and Philadelphia at New Orleans were tremendously entertaining. Five of the 10 playoff games so far have been great games -- if this is caused by parity, I want more parity.

In hulking lineman news, we saw three offensive touchdowns by linemen in the New England-Indianapolis game! Plus one of the best plays of this year's bowl season came when Alabama threw a designed lateral to an offensive tackle for a touchdown. Maybe it will actually become sexy to play the line! I knew I was born too soon.

And in other football news, below find the annual Tuesday Morning Quarterback All-Unwanted All-Pros -- the NFL's best players who were never drafted, or were let go, or both. Next week: The winner of the coveted "longest award in sports," the Tuesday Morning Quarterback Non-QB Non-RB NFL MVP.

**Stat of the Week No. 1:** From the late second quarter to middle of the third quarter, Indianapolis snapped the ball 36 times, compared to five snaps for New England.

**Stat of the Week No. 2:** Adam Vinatieri is 29-for-29 kicking for and against Indianapolis at the RCA Dome.

**Stat of the Week No. 3:** Since the team with the best regular season record (San Diego) will not win the Super Bowl, in nine of the last 10 seasons the team with the best regular season record failed to win the Super Bowl. (In 2003, New England had the best regular-season record and also won the Super Bowl; in 2002, Tampa won the Super Bowl after a 12-4 regular season and Philadelphia was also 12-4. But the league seeded Philadelphia first based on tiebreakers.)

**Stat of the Week No. 4:** Since the current playoff format was adopted in 1990, 27 of 34 Super Bowl entrants had bye weeks to start the postseason.

**Stat of the Week No. 5:** Placekickers are 42-of-45 in field goal attempts in the postseason, or 93.3 percent.

**Stat of the Week No. 6:** John Branch of the New York Times points out that the 93.3 percent success on field goal attempts is better than PAT success in the regular season 30 years ago, when placekickers hit on 90.8 percent of attempts.

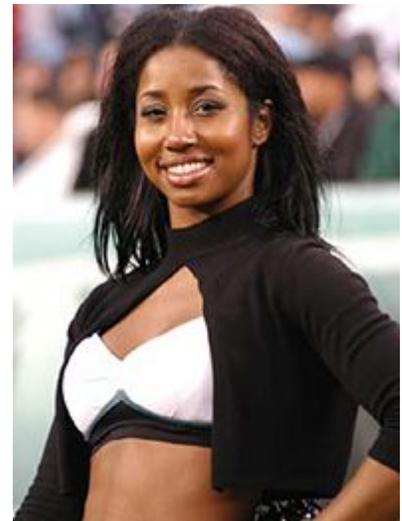
**Stat of the Week No. 7:** The overall field goal success rate of 81.4 percent during the 2006 regular season was the NFL's best ever. Thirty placekickers who attempted 10 or more field goals achieved a better kicking percentage than the 66.8 percent career accuracy of Jan Stenerud, the only full-time placekicker in the Hall of Fame.

**Stat of the Week No. 8:** New England converted 19 fourth-down attempts this season, best in the league.

**Stat of the Week No. 9:** Peyton Manning is 6-6 as a postseason starter, Tony Dungy is 8-8 as a postseason coach.

**Stat of the Week No. 10:** Dome teams are 0-10 in outdoor conference championship games.

**Cheerleader of the Week:** Evan Birnholz of Highland Park, Ill., nominates [Alyse of the Eagles](#), his classmate at the School of Public Health at Drexel University. According to her team bio, as an undergrad Alyse majored in geography at West Chester University. Using her geography degree, perhaps she could explain to the NFL that the "New York" Giants and "New York" Jets do not play in New York!



Alyse of the Eagles' cheerleaders, who now have an entire offseason to try to figure out if it is physically possible for them to wear less.

**Actual British Government Office -- Not a Monty Python Ministry:** Last week there was controversy in the United Kingdom regarding the cover-up of an inquest into bribery in military contracting, this inquest being conducted by the government's [Serious Fraud Office](#). Apparently in England humorous fraud is fine! Interested in a career in Serious Fraud enforcement? The organization offers ["a salary structure and reward and recognition package which rewards performance"](#) -- we're not clear if that means performance in ferreting out fraud, or covering it up. Also offered to employees are "interest-free loans for season ticket purchase." If the public has to finance its own seasons tickets, but government officials are getting them interest-free, that sounds like something that should be looked into by the Serious Fraud Office.

**Americans Now Hear the Word "Pleasure" 100 Times for Every Actual Experience of Pleasure:** TMQ is being driven crazy by the modern affectation of saying "my pleasure" in formal settings that have nothing to do with pleasure. When you call a Hyatt hotel and ask to be transferred to a guest room or the front desk, the Hyatt operator says, "My pleasure." Lots of corporate-run chains are instructing workers to say "my pleasure" in situations far removed from what the word means. It's even catching on with intellectuals; recently David Remnick, editor of the New Yorker, signed off from an NPR interview by invoking this phrase. (NPR: "Thanks, David." Remnick: "My pleasure.") "My pleasure" is a ridiculously overloaded surrogate for "sure" or "happy to do it" or "you're welcome." More, its adaptation as a hollow chestnut of mundane interaction seems part of the overall cheapening of the meaning of words. Pleasure is one of the greatest and highest experiences of life; in our short stay on this Earth, we know far too little. And pleasure is almost always intimate in nature. Using the word "pleasure" in contexts that have nothing to do with intimacy or delight seems a cruel little joke in a world of too much work and too little enjoyment.

**New Orleans at Chicago Analysis:** No! Don't point! Don't taunt! As Reggie Bush ran down the sideline for his 88-yard touchdown that would pull the Saints to within 16-14 early in the third quarter, Bush pointed at the Chicago defender who was trailing him, Brian Urlacher, in the kind of juvenile gesture that would make a high school coach furious. Bush then somersaulted into the end zone -- but it was the taunting while he ran that worried TMQ. By convention, football accepts that the guy who scores a touchdown gets to celebrate: I didn't object to the somersault, and few players would object. But to run down the field pointing at the defenders and mocking them was to invoke the wrath of the football gods. And to do it while your team was behind on the road! Yea, verily, the football gods spoke. To the point Reggie Bush acted out, the New Orleans offense had been playing well. Here is what happened on the remaining New Orleans possessions of the game: missed field goal, safety, punt, fumble, interception, turnover on downs, turnover on downs. Reggie -- you're an underdog on the road, your team is behind, and you think it's a good idea to mock the other side's best player and leader? What a screwup. Hey, you kids out there: Dance in the end zone but never, ever point or wave the ball or taunt on the field of play.

New Orleans knew that last year in the postseason at Chicago, Carolina threw the ball in the cold and made sport of the Bears' cornerbacks. The Saints' game plan was the same, with New Orleans' coaches calling 34 passes and nine rushes to the point when the game was still tight (the safety), Drew Brees ultimately throwing for 354 yards. Obviously turnovers killed the underdogs -- three lost fumbles, an interception and the safety, which is a turnover plus points, versus no turnovers for the hosts. But let's not leave out pass-wackiness as a cause of the Saints' demise.

Trailing 16-14, the Boy Scouts reached first-and-10 on the Chicago 29, on a day when they averaged 4.7 yards per rush. Incompletion, incompletion, incompletion, missed long field goal attempt. Had New Orleans gained even five more yards, a field goal puts the Saints ahead and might have altered the dynamic of the contest. Then after a Bears punt, tally still 16-14, the Saints had first-and-10 on their own 5. You've just tossed three straight incompletions, how about a rush to get Brees some room to operate? Incompletion, then intentional grounding from the end zone to avoid a sack, and it's 18-14 plus Chicago ball. One possession later it's still 18-14 and New Orleans faced third-and-2 on its 40: incompletion, punt, quick Chicago touchdown and the Saints never threatened again. You cannot win in Chicago in January by calling 53 passes and 11 rushes, which is what the Saints' coaches called -- and this distribution was established long before the fourth quarter when New Orleans had to heave-ho.

The New Orleans season was a huge success, in part because of good coaching, yet TMQ left the game puzzled by numerous Saints' decisions. For kickoffs, New Orleans lined up with Bush on the kicking team's right and beer man Michael Lewis on its left; each time Chicago deliberately kicked left to Lewis, who had seven kickoff returns for a measly 18.9-yard average. Seeing that the Bears were kicking to Lewis, why didn't the Saints' coaches have Bush and Lewis switch places as the Chicago kicker approached the ball? Footing was bad despite the high-tech heated new field at Soldier Field. (The whole new stadium arrived in a flying saucer, so you know it's high-tech.) Bad footing usually favors the offense, because the offensive player knows where he's going; on bad footing, crossing patterns drive defensive backs crazy because it's so hard to get through the pick. Yet the Saints called few crossing patterns or double-receiver sets -- playing indoors seems to have made them forget outdoor tactics. The long touchdown to Bush was a crossing pattern -- he cut under a pick by Marques Colston. But otherwise crossing patterns were few for the Saints.

Meanwhile the New Orleans offensive line, one of the best in the league this season, had an unimpressive outing. Left tackle Jammal Brown, who made the Pro Bowl on hype -- all four other New Orleans offensive linemen are better than he is -- was often out of position, or needed guard

help. Game scoreless, New Orleans facing third-and-4, Brees was sacked and fumbled; the Saints recovered for a 25-yard loss. On the play, Brown lines up across from Chicago right defensive end Mark Anderson, and in pretty much all blocking schemes known to man, the left tackle takes the right defensive end. But Brown just let Anderson go -- never so much as touched him -- and Anderson sprinted straight to Brees unhindered, and caused the fumble. Watching the replay gave me a sick feeling. The New Orleans left tackle, left guard and center triple-teamed the Chicago right defensive tackle, while none of these three even glanced at the guy who went unblocked to the quarterback.

As regards the Ming Ding Xiong ("Bears whose outcomes are decided by fate" in Chinese), people complain nonstop about the baby-faced Rex Grossman, but he's 19-7 as a starter. Grossman struggled and was only 3-of-12 at intermission. But his deep passes were almost there, and you knew New Orleans would become complacent about him, which it did. At the end of the third quarter, Grossman drove the Bears 85 yards for the pull-away touchdown, throwing four times and connecting for 12, 13, 20 and 33 yards. Only then did New Orleans coaches pull weak corner Fred Thomas -- who just doesn't have it anymore after 11 seasons -- but the damage was done. The Bears offensive line did not allow a sack, taking the Saints' pair of first-round-drafted defensive ends out of the game, and pull-trapping well.

My worry was that Chicago went pass-wacky at the goal line, which is the worst place to go pass-wacky. On Chicago's first first-and-goal, at the New Orleans 3, the Bears rushed once and threw twice. The result was two incompletions and a field goal. On Chicago's second first-and-goal, at the New Orleans 8, the Bears rushed once and threw twice. The result was two incompletions and a field goal. On Chicago's third first-and-goal, at the New Orleans 9, Chicago rushed twice, touchdown. That's how you win in the snow.

As for that Brian Urlacher -- nobody hustles more. He was the sole Chicago defender who never gave up chasing Bush's long run. Several times when Bush split wide, Urlacher moved out to cover him one-on-one. Urlacher is the kind of guy who could be the Tuesday Morning Quarterback Non-QB Non-RB NFL MVP.

**Box Office Figures Also Were Exaggerated:** The new movie "300," extremely very loosely based on accounts of the 300 Spartans who held off a the entire Persian army at the battle of Thermopylae in 480 B.C., depicts the infantry of the invading Perisan king Xerxes as so vast and numerous the men stretch to the horizons -- at least tens of thousands of soldiers. This is nonsense. Ancient population estimates are notoriously vague, but in 480 B.C., there probably were no more than 100 million people in the entire world: No nation was able to field an army of vast numbers. Most scholars believe the first city with a population of one million did not exist until the 8th century A.D., more than a thousand years after the events depicted in "300." (The first city with a population of one million is believed to have been Baghdad.) "Four Thousand Years of Urban Growth: An Historical Census," by Tertius Chandler, estimates that the largest city in the world at the time depicted in the movie "300" was Babylon, with 300,000 to 400,000 residents.



That fleet of ships in the background?  
Artistic license.

Babylon was the Persian capital, but it is close to inconceivable a city of that size could have sent the army depicted in "300," since perhaps one resident in five could be a healthy military-age male, and if all the men in the city had gone off to invade Greece, they would have returned to find Babylon invaded by somebody else!

In the 2004 Brad Pitt demi-epic "Troy," the fleet assembled by the Greek king Agamemnon to sail against Troy is depicted as hundreds of sail vessels stretching as far as the eye can see. This also is nonsense. Assuming it actually happened, the Trojan war is thought to have occurred about 700 years before Thermopylae. At that time it is likely there were no more than a few hundred thousand people living in Greece. A population of that size could not have built a fleet of hundreds of ships, especially considering this was 3,300 years ago when all work would have been done by hand. Population estimates in ancient times are thought to have been routinely inflated by chroniclers. Exodus says that "600,000 men on foot," plus women and children, fled Egypt when God parted the waters. Most likely all Egypt in the time of Moses had a population of less than 1 million. But even inflated populations could not have built hundreds of warships 3,300 years ago!

Note 1: Leonidas, the Spartan leader at Thermopylae, in youth was told a prophecy, that either Greece would be destroyed, or a Spartan king would volunteer to die in a battle against impossible odds, inspiring the rest of Greece to resist the invaders. Legend says Leonidas and his best warriors chose death in order to honor the prophecy. Today we remember Leonidas not as a hero of democracy but as a brand of [luxury chocolates](#). Note 2: today "B.C." is shunned in academia because it means Before Christ. Most PC texts instead use "B.C.E.," for Before Common Era. But as noted by reader Sonny Bunch of Washington, D.C., the zero year of B.C.E. is still the birth of Jesus -- so using B.C.E. does not change the Christian-centrism, just replaces an informative, factually specific term with a fuzzy euphemism.



If Leonidas had 300 truffles instead of 300 Spartans, Greece would have fallen.

**ESPN Editors from the Future Just Sent a TMQ of the Year 2107 Backwards in Time, and It Complains About Not Enough Blitzing and Too Many Male Cheerleaders:** Last year Astronomy magazine ran a cover story promising, "Time travel, long a staple of science fiction, may not be too far from reality!" Maybe this story came backwards through time, because when you flipped inside, you found the story was premised on the existence of wormholes and vibrating superstrings -- neither of which have ever been observed -- and did not suggest in any way how time machines would function on an engineering basis. More important, like all time-travel speculation, the story skipped the subject of where, exactly, time travelers would travel to. The big objection to time travel isn't the time machine, it's the "where would you go?" problem. Time travel requires there be an infinite number of universes, each eternally frozen in an instant of the past or future \_ that is, destinations for the time traveler to reach. Maybe there are an infinite number of frozen universes, but what are the odds of that?

Give Astronomy credit for noting that technology is moving toward a very limited form of time manipulation. The faster one travels, the slower one ages. Until jet air travel, no man or woman moved at a speed in which "relativistic" time measurement came into play. Today, take a 600 mph transoceanic jet trip, and when you land you are 10 billionths of a second younger than those who were not flying during those hours. That kind of gain is irrelevant, and it may be that at jet speeds, the stress of jet lag reduces lifespan. (A recent [University of Virginia study](#) suggested mice die younger if subjected to repeated simulated transatlantic flights.) But Astronomy pointed out that if technology eventually allows travel at one-half the speed of light, someone taking a 50-year round-trip flight to the Vega star system will return to Earth 13 years younger than those who remained behind -- those on Earth will age 50 years during the voyage, while the travelers will age 37 years. Boost the speed to 99 percent of the velocity of light and the travelers gain 43 years -- everyone on Earth still ages the same 50 years, but the people getting off the Vega starship have aged only seven years. Calculations like this make it conceivable, at least, there will someday be voyages to other worlds, even if the light-speed barrier proves absolute and there never is any kind of faster-than-light stardrive. Star trekkers might be willing to accept trips only a few years long by their body clocks, especially if suspended animation is developed.



Your time machine is ready, sir. Unfortunately, there is nowhere for it to go.

**Another Cosmic Thought :** Recently Mordechai Kislev of [Bar-Ilan University](#) in Israel found evidence of figs grown by controlled cultivation about 11,400 years ago in the Jordan Valley. The standard estimate had been that the first domesticated crop plant was wheat, first grown perhaps 10,000 years ago in what is now southern Turkey. Now it appears that men and women were cultivating crops at least a thousand years earlier than previously believed. Every time telescopes improve, the universe appears larger and older; paleontology keeps finding evidence that complex life is older than previously estimated; now it's looking like farming-based civilization is older than once believed. We are part of a cosmic enterprise whose size, scope and age we may yet barely grasp.

**Life Imitates Art:** Last week TMQ complained that announcers practically say, "He could have gone all the way if he hadn't been tackled!" New England at Indianapolis: Jim Nantz of CBS cried of a catch on which Reggie Wayne gained 13 yards, "If he hadn't been tackled he might have gone all the way!"

**Next, the Cruiser Mark Foley :** The Navy just announced its next supercarrier will be the *Gerald Ford*. The ship is the first of a new design supplanting the current *Nimitz*-class, and thus the new class of supercarriers will also be named *Ford*-class. The three most recent supercarriers, the *Harry Truman*, *Ronald Reagan* and *George H.W. Bush*, are all named for presidents. This is a big step up from the previous



Everything they find makes civilization seem older -- and remember, they're literally just scratching the surface.

supercarrier, the *John Stennis*, which was named for a congressional committee chairman who opposed the civil rights legislation of the 1960s and whose main accomplishment in the Senate was never saying no to a Pentagon budget overrun. The British Navy has ships with glorious names such as *Illustrious* and *Invincible*. America has ships named after committee chairmen!

Check the list of the [U.S. Navy's supercarriers](#) and note the presidential succession. Of postwar presidents, Republicans Dwight Eisenhower, Ford, Reagan and the elder George Bush have supercarriers named after them; Democrats Truman and John Kennedy have supercarriers in their names; the missing presidents are Richard Nixon, Lyndon Johnson, Jimmy Carter and Bill Clinton. Since Nixon is the only president ever to have resigned, it would be inappropriate to name a ship after him. That means there are three postwar presidents worthy to have their names placed on Navy capital ships, who have not had a supercarrier named for them - - and all are Democrats. Attention Pentagon: You're not supposed to be partisan, how come the Navy is showing favoritism to the Republican Party in the naming of supercarriers?



They're clapping because the model costs a lot less than the actual *Gerald Ford* will cost.

There is an attack submarine named for Carter, but no ship named for Johnson or Clinton. Bill Clinton was elected to the presidency twice; Gerald Ford was never elected to any national office, and served only an interregnum term in the White House; Jimmy Carter is the only living president to have won the Nobel Peace Prize; yet Ford's name now graces the new class of supercarriers, while the Navy has extended only a lesser honor to Carter and no honors to Johnson or Clinton. This seems cheap political favoritism unbecoming the United States military.

Note 1: See [from the Navy's list](#) that there was once a carrier named the *Franklin Roosevelt*, but this name, honoring the greatest Democratic president, has been retired. Lots of other glorious carrier names have also been retired, including the *America*, *Constellation*, *Tarawa*, *Saratoga*, *Coral Sea*, *Valley Forge* and others. These are storied names -- and out of use, while a man who opposed desegregation is honored. Note 2: The shipyard in Cherbourg, France, is building the final nuclear missile submarine of its *Triumphant* class. The boat's name? The *Terrible*. There couldn't be a more fitting name for a ship whose purpose is launching nuclear warheads.

**New England at Indianapolis Analysis:** The big play of this contest was the Indianapolis field goal with 11 seconds remaining in the first half, making it New England 21, Indianapolis 6 at intermission. The Colts had fourth-and-goal on the Flying Elvii 8 when they sent in the kicking unit. Kick Early Go For It Late! Indianapolis absolutely had to score at the end of the first half. The field goal made it a two-touchdown game and gave the hosts realistic hope; had Indianapolis tried for the touchdown and failed, the contest would have been over. A field goal might not seem like much when you're behind 21-3, but these three points -- plus the fact that the Indianapolis cheerleaders changed outfits at halftime and appeased the football gods, see below -- let the Colts know victory remained possible. To the point of the last-second first-half field goal, Indianapolis had gone 20 consecutive postseason possessions without a touchdown. The next three Indianapolis possessions? Touchdown, touchdown, touchdown.

The Colts' epic comeback exemplifies a point TMQ often makes about comebacks -- when you're way behind in the second half you are probably toast, but when you're way behind in the first half, you have just as much time remaining to come back as your opponent took to get ahead. Let's

christen this the Law of Remaining Clock. The biggest comeback in NFL history, Buffalo back from 35-3 to beat Houston in the playoffs, began two snaps into the second half; the key point was that the Bills had just as much time to come back as the Oilers had expended getting ahead. In the second-greatest comeback, San Francisco back from 35-7 to beat New Orleans in the regular season, the comeback began on the first play of the second half; the key point was that the Niners had just as much time to come back as the Saints had expended getting ahead. My sons badly wanted Indianapolis to win, and when it was 21-3, their hearts sank. "Look at the clock, it's still the first half," I told them. Most likely Colts' coaches were rallying their players with the same words.

Resisting the urge to panic helped the Colts' comeback. Taking the second half kickoff and trailing 21-6, Indianapolis coaches called eight rushing plays on the 76-yard touchdown drive that turned the game into a tense, close contest. Then on the next possession came the play that Colts players, coaches and front office people, especially Bill Polian, have been waiting for since the 2004 AFC Championship. In that game, New England was never called for defensive pass interference, despite numerous obvious muggings of Colts' receivers. Bill Belichick, knowing officials tend to call defensive pass interference and offensive holding (the two most damaging penalties) less as the postseason progresses, had instructed his defensive backs to interfere with Colts receivers mercilessly until such time as a flag was thrown -- and a flag was never thrown. Polian complained bitterly after that game, and should have; the league changed its officiating procedures, instructing zebras to end the traditional practice of switching to "let the boys play" in the postseason. Then in 2005, New England beat Indianapolis again in the playoffs, and again was never flagged for defensive pass interference. Now it's the third quarter of the 2007 AFC Championship, and once again New England has not been flagged for defensive interference. Eleven consecutive postseason quarters between the Pats and Colts and we're supposed to believe New England has never once interfered with an Indianapolis receiver? Finally the yellow flies -- Ellis Hobbs called for pass interference in the end zone. Polian must have yelled, "Finally, FINALLY!" Ball spotted on the 1, and on the next play, Peyton Manning threw a touchdown pass to defensive tackle Dan Klecko, lined up as a blocking back. Putting a big defender in as a blocking back at the goal line, then throwing to him, is one of Bill Belichick's favorite tricks. How the football gods must have chortled to see Belichick's own trick used against him.

The RCA Dome was weirdly quiet when the Colts took possession on their 20 with 3:49 remaining, trailing 34-31. I'm thinking: Now's your chance, go win the game! The crowd was obviously thinking: Ohmygawd they're gonna lose again. The RCA Dome was again weirdly quiet when the Colts got the ball back, again on their 20, with 2:17 remaining and one timeout, still trailing 34-31. I'm thinking: The football gods just gave you a second chance, go win the game! The crowd was obviously thinking: Ohmygawd. First Peyton Manning threw a short out to Reggie Wayne, who stepped out of bounds to stop the clock. Then Manning threw a perfect strike to Bryan Fletcher, the Colts' third tight end, who was on the field owing to an injury to someone else -- coming into the game, he had 18 receptions on the season. Fletcher promptly dropped the ball as if it was a live ferret. On the next snap, Colts' coaches or Manning or both did something beautiful and inspired that, of course, the announcers utterly



The Colts' cheerleaders' halftime switch of outfits was essential to the Indianapolis comeback.

missed. They called a play for Fletcher -- the same backup who had just dropped the ball -- and what they called was a deep pass. Fortune favors the bold! Thirty-two yard completion to Fletcher, and a few snaps later, ecstasy in the RCA Dome.

The home timekeeper had a big play on Fletcher's reception, too. The ball snapped with 2:08 showing, and as Fletcher strove out of bounds the Indianapolis timekeeper stopped the clock with 2:01 showing, thus handing the Colts an extra play before the two-minute warning. It turned out the extra snap had no role in the outcome, as the home team scored the winning touchdown at 1:02. Had the Colts scored to win on the final down, today a huge controversy would be swirling over the mysterious clock-stop at 2:01. (There's no way the play in question took only seven seconds.) Reaching first-and-10 on the New England 11 with 1:53 remaining, the Colts acted very New England-like by rushing three straight times to kill some clock before scoring. The winning touchdown came up the middle behind a Hall of Fame block by undrafted center Jeff Saturday, who shoved out of the picture the huge, first-round defensive tackle Vince Wilfork. Saturday is the kind of guy who could be the Tuesday Morning Quarterback Non-QB Non-RB NFL MVP.

As for the Patriots, they vary game plans week-to-week more than any NFL team, and opened on offense with something they hadn't showed much lately -- "bunch" formations as opposed to spreads. Two early Flying Elvii touchdowns resulted, and the Patriot offense continued to perform well -- 27 points on the road in a championship game is a good day. New England always runs a creative play that causes you to say "Wow, that was sweet." Games scoreless, the Patriots had third-and-9, and lined four-wide with receiving-downs back Kevin Faulk on Tom Brady's left. The Colts looked like they would blitz from the offensive right; Tom Brady madly motioned Faulk over to the right, as if instructing him to blitz-block. Then Brady handed off to Faulk running left behind pulling right guard Steve Neal. The eight-yard gain set up a 35-yard run by Corey Dillon on fourth-and-1, in turn setting up New England's first touchdown. Later, game tied at 21, New England facing third-and-goal on the Indianapolis 6, Brady threw a perfect strike to Jabar Gaffney at the back of the end zone, and the latest Belichick reclamation project made a perfect catch. Brady openly tells people that he looks to the back of the end zone in this situation because defenders lose track of the back of the end zone, and they did on this play. Brady tells people where he's going to look and still fools them!

There was a colossal hidden play at the endgame -- hidden plays being ones that never make highlight reels, but stop or sustain drives. Game tied with 8 minutes remaining, New England had first down on the Indianapolis 18. Reclamation project Reche Caldwell, who's had a fine year, lined up right and was uncovered by any Colt. He waved madly for Brady to snap the ball and toss it his way. When Brady finally did -- nothing but turf between Caldwell and the end zone -- Reche dropped the pass as if it was a live ferret. New England settled for a field goal, four lost points helping determine the outcome.

Good as New England always is, its offensive strategy in the endgame seemed puzzling. Leading 34-31 with 2:39 remaining, facing second-and-8, the Patriots came out empty backfield. This is a clock-killer situation, run the ball! Short pass, Indianapolis timeout. Now facing third-and-4 with 2:30 remaining, the Patriots came out empty backfield. This is a clock-killer situation, run the ball! Incompletion stopping the clock, and the home team gets possession back with plenty of time.

The New England defense had a fine season, finishing second-best behind Baltimore in points allowed, then had two good playoff outings versus Jersey/B and San Diego before finally running out of steam against a Colts' offense that was due for a breakout. Ty Warren, Asante Samuel, Mike Vrabel and other Pats defenders had Pro Bowl caliber years, though only Richard Seymour received a free ticket to Hawaii. For the last two seasons, Samuel has been the best cornerback in the NFL,

but shut out of Hawaii because he's not the flashy, boastful type of corner the Pro Bowl voters favors. Now that Samuel has returned two interceptions for touchdowns in the same postseason, he should get his due in ink. (Warning to Colts' coaches -- three of Peyton Manning's six postseason interceptions have come on short turn or hook passes to the right intended for Marvin Harrison; corners have noticed some cue that tips them this action is coming.) But bear in mind that concentration and fundamentals, not flashy plays, are the best aspects of Asante Samuel's game. Samuel is the kind of guy who could be the Tuesday Morning Quarterback Non-QB Non-RB NFL MVP.

Small puzzle: Why didn't Belichick challenge the Saturday fumble recovery ruled a touchdown for the Colts, tying the game at 28 early in the fourth quarter? Replays clearly showed Saturday was down before the ball broke the plane, and New England had all three timeouts. A successful challenge would have made it New England 28, Indianapolis 21 with the Colts facing third-and-goal on the Pats' 1. Probably the hosts would have scored anyway, but something might have gone wrong for Indianapolis on third-and-goal at the 1, too. This seemed a rare case of Belichick showing less than complete attention on a small detail. (The Colts would not have gotten a first down from Saturday's recovery; if the offense recovers its own fumble shy of the "line to gain," a first down is awarded only if the loose ball was in the possession of the defense at some point during the down.)

**Wacky Food of the Week:** Recently at [this restaurant](#) -- which bills itself as "one of the 100 hottest restaurants in the world," I would have been quite happy to be one of the 100 hottest guys on that city block at that moment -- TMQ was confronted with "yuzu barbeque" and "boniato root puree."

**Hillary Tempts the Election Gods:** "I'm in, and I'm in to win." So began the announcement Hillary Clinton sent to her supporters. Matt Hasselbeck once said at the coin flip of a playoff overtime, "We want the ball and we're gonna score." That didn't turn out so well. If you type "Hillary for president" into Google, it produces four addresses that appear to be the official campaign site, and it's hard to tell which is which. Note that on what is, I think, the actual official site, there is no text to Hillary's announcement, just a [YouTube video clip](#). Imagine if George Washington had no text for his Farewell Address, just posted the clip on YouTube -- then known as ThouTributary. In case you haven't already noticed this, if Hillary wins the recent presidential succession in the United States will have been: Bush, Clinton, Bush, Clinton.

**Bonus Cheerleader of the Week:** [Jessica E. of the Colts](#), who according to her team bio works as a "lifestyle marketing manager." When will someone sell me a lifestyle! Reader Rob Craig of Indianapolis writes to report that he and his friends watching the AFC Championship felt cold waves of dread when the Colts' cheerleaders came out in chaps that were sexy but hardly displayed cheerleader professionalism; predictably, the home team was down 21-6 at halftime. For the second half the Colts cheerleaders stripped off the chaps and danced in short-shorts, and predictably, the home team rallied to victory. When TMQ saw the naughty-cowgirl outfits the Colts' cheerleaders changed to at halftime, immediately I thought: Giddyup!



Jessica of the Colts' cheerleaders, who's selling the indoor, dome-based lifestyle.

**All-Unwanted All Pros:** Each year Tuesday Morning Quarterback names the All-Unwanted All Pros -- the NFL's best players who went undrafted, or were let go, or both. My definition of "let go" is hazy. Traded players do not qualify as let go, since their teams got something in return. Players whose original teams could not keep them for salary cap reasons don't qualify. But anyone who was waived or who left in free agency when his original team made no bona-fide attempt to retain him can make my squad. An asterisk means the player has been let go more than once, or went undrafted and was also let go; boldface means the player belongs in the real Pro Bowl. You'll see a lot of boldface in my All-Unwanted All-Pros, which tells you just how many successful NFL performers were originally shrugged at by the experts.

First Team

#### OFFENSIVE LINE

**Ruben Brown**, Chicago (was waived in 2003 as washed up)

**Jamar Nesbit**,\* New Orleans (undrafted and waived twice)

**Jeff Saturday**, Indianapolis (future first-ballot Hall of Fame center was undrafted)

**Brian Waters**, Kansas City (undrafted former Berlin Thunder player)

**Steve Neal**,\* New England (undrafted, waived twice, did not play college football)

#### TIGHT END

**Antonio Gates**, San Diego (undrafted and did not play football in college)

#### WIDE RECEIVERS

Reche Caldwell, New England (dismissed by league as a bust, this season Caldwell started more games for the Patriots than in his entire previous four-year career)

Mike Furrey,\* Detroit (undrafted and waived twice *in the Arena League*; was a defensive back in 2005)

#### TAILBACKS

**Willie Parker**, Pittsburgh (undrafted and did not start in college)

Warrick Dunn, Atlanta (let go by Tampa as "too small," just completed third consecutive thousand-yard season)

#### FULLBACK

**Lorenzo Neal**,\* San Diego (let go four times, was blocking back during the best years of LaDainian Tomlinson, Corey Dillon and Eddie George)

## **QUARTERBACK**

**Drew Brees**, New Orleans (unwanted in San Diego and turned down when he offered to play for Miami)

## **DEFENSIVE LINEMEN**

Bryce Fisher,\* Seattle (graduate of the Air Force Academy, where they make you attend class!)

**Trevor Pryce**, Baltimore (four-time Pro Bowler was let go by Denver after 2005 season)

Warren Sapp, Oakland (led league in sacks by a defensive tackle; *two years ago*, CBS Sportsline said of Sapp, "This guy is done. Finished.")

**Pat Williams**,\* Minnesota (undrafted; Minnesota's incredible figure of just 2.8 yards per rush allowed is largely this large gentlemen's doing)

## **LINEBACKERS**

**London Fletcher**,\* Buffalo (undrafted after playing DIII in college; since 2000 has more tackles than Ray Lewis or Zach Thomas)

**Bart Scott**, Baltimore (first-round picks Terrell Suggs and Adalius Thomas get the press, undrafted Scott does the work)

**Mike Vrabel**, New England

## **DEFENSIVE BACKS**

Ryan Clark,\* Pittsburgh (undrafted and let go three times)

Ty Law,\* Kansas City

Walt Harris, San Francisco (Chainsaw Dan Snyder released Harris to free up money to sign safety Adam Archuleta, who failed to start for Washington)

Kevin Kaesviharn,\* Cincinnati (see below)

Second Team

## **OFFENSIVE LINE**

Joe Andruzzi,\* Cleveland (undrafted, waived twice and played DII in college)

Marc Colombo, Dallas (dismissed by the league as a bust, started only two games from 2003 to 2005)

Pete Kendall, Jersey/B

Chris Naeole, Jacksonville

Jason Peters,\* Buffalo (undrafted and waived twice; was a tight end in college)

## **TIGHT END**

Desmond Clark, Chicago

## **WIDE RECEIVERS**

Terrell Owens,\* Dallas (it hurts to put him here, but he caught 13 touchdown passes)

Wes Welker,\* Miami (makes it over Terry Glenn because Welker is also a special teams ace)

## **TAILBACKS**

Thomas Jones, Chicago

Chester Taylor, Minnesota

## **FULLBACK**

Jim Finn,\* Jersey/A (Ivy League grad from Penn)

## **QUARTERBACK**

Jeff Garcia,\* Philadelphia (undrafted former CFL player, let go twice in NFL)

## **DEFENSIVE LINEMEN**

Jason Ferguson, Dallas

Vonnie Holliday,\* Miami  
Rod Coleman, Atlanta  
Kelly Gregg,\* Baltimore (tastefully named!)

### LINEBACKERS

Ben Leber, Minnesota  
Donnie Edwards, San Diego (plays inside linebacker at 227 pounds)  
David Thornton, Tennessee (once had 145 tackles with Colts)

### DEFENSIVE BACKS

Darren Sharper, Minnesota  
Robert Griffith,\* Arizona (undrafted and let go twice, has had an impressive 13-year NFL career)  
Marlon McCree,\* San Diego (Marlon -- on fourth down, *knock it down!*)  
Brian Williams, Jacksonville

### KICKING TEAMS

Placekicker: **Robbie Gould**, Chicago (undrafted, his 143-point season would have led the league in scoring were it not for LaDainian Tomlinson's 31 touchdowns)  
Punter: **Brian Moorman**,\* Buffalo  
Long-snapper: Jon Dorenbos,\* Philadelphia (during offseason, works as a magician in Vegas)  
Returner: B.J. Sams, Baltimore  
Special teamers: **Sean Morey**, Pittsburgh (Ivy league grad from Brown); **Kassim Osgood**\*, San Diego

Honorable mention: Morten Andersen, Atlanta. The NFL's new all-time leading scorer was let go FIVE TIMES and did not play in 2005 because no one wanted him

Tuesday Morning Quarterback's Unwanted Player of the Year is Kevin Kaesviharn, safety and nickel back for Cincinnati. Kaesviharn played Division II ball at tiny Augustana in South Dakota, graduated in 1997, and was out of football for *four years* before earning a tryout in 2001 with the Green Bay Packers, who promptly waived him. Kaesviharn caught on as a Bengals' special-teams player, then was waived and re-signed three times. Kaesviharn gradually played his way into the lineup, starting most Cincinnati games since 2003, and drew some votes for the Pro Bowl this season. At the risk of sounding really corny -- kids, if you've got a dream, never give up.



TMQ's Unwanted Player of the Year.

**Belichick Ensemble Watch:** On Sunday not only did he go with the cutoff hoodie again, Belichick had a wooden pencil in his ear. But he doesn't hold anything to write on, so why did he need a pencil? At the current rate of deterioration in Belichick's willingness to dress up in public, by midseason 2007 he will be wearing painter's coveralls and sandals on the sideline.

**Reader Animadversion:** Got a complaint or a deeply held grievance? Write me at [TMQ\\_ESPN@yahoo.com](mailto:TMQ_ESPN@yahoo.com). Include your real name and the name of your hometown, and I may quote you by name unless you instruct me otherwise. Note: giving your hometown improves your odds of being quoted.

**Next Week:** A week with no football on television -- can this be legal? Tide yourself over with the Tuesday Morning Quarterback Non-QB Non-RB NFL MVP.

Wednesday, January 24, 2007

TMQ Nation fires back

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By Gregg Easterbrook

**Salman Mitha of Munich, Germany** reports that the NFC Championship Game aired live in Germany with German color commentary. Whenever fourth down was reached, the color man declared, "Sie müssen gepunten" -- they must punt. No! Don't let the pernicious notion that teams "must" punt corrupt Old Europe like it has corrupted the New World!

**Steve Martinez of San Bernardino, Calif.** notes, "You wrote, 'Pleasure is one of the greatest and highest experiences of life; in our short stay on this Earth.' Although I agree with your statement, I must object to the capitalization of earth. The planet's name is not Earth, as so many children are taught. The proper name is Terra. We don't capitalize 'the Sun,' because our star's proper name is Sol. 'The earth' really refers to what is on the surface of Terra, which revolves around Sol."

On whether BCE, for Before Common Era, should replace BC, meaning Before Christ, **Jessica Castora of Plymouth, Minn.** writes, "You were wrong to contend that BCE is just a PC euphemism for BC. The birth of Jesus most likely did not occur in the year 1 AD/CE. Rather, Jesus was probably born around what we now call 6 BC or BCE. That means Jesus was actually born in the time Before Christ! Speaking of a Common Era removes this problem." **Cleland Welton of Lexington, Va.** adds, "While BC is merely descriptive, AD is a religious proclamation, standing for Anno Domini -- Year of Our Lord. Changing the whole system to Common Era makes sense to remove the Christian-centrism."

**William Wright** writes, "I was surprised you did not mention that when Marlin Jackson intercepted Tom Brady with 20 seconds remaining in the AFC Championship Game, he took two steps and dropped down, not wanting to risk contact that could cause a fumble." When Jackson caught that ball my sons, both rooting for the Colts, immediately hollered, "Get on the ground!" San Diego fans could only gnash their teeth.

TMQ complained that the Pentagon has named supercarriers for recent Republican presidents Ronald Reagan, George H. W. Bush and now Gerald Ford, while naming no capital ships for recent Democratic presidents Lyndon Johnson, Jimmy Carter and Bill Clinton. Although it would sound pretty funny if the White House announced, "Today the president ordered

the *Bill Clinton* carrier battle group to the Persian Gulf," recent capital ship names nevertheless seem to me indicative of favoritism toward one party, which is unbecoming the military. **Ensign**

**Juan Torres of Monterey, Calif.** noted that because Carter served on a submarine, it was his preference that a submarine carry his name: "Jimmy Carter is the only president to have graduated from the United States Naval Academy and served as a submariner, so the Navy recognizes him by having an attack submarine, the USS *Jimmy Carter*, SSN-23, [bear his name](#)." Fair enough. That still leaves the question of why the latest supercarrier is named for Ford, who was a fine man but was



Depending on how the federal deficit goes, it may not be long until this ship is the USS *Jimmy Carter Brought to You by Quiznos*.

never elected to any national office, while popularly elected presidents Johnson and Clinton are shunned.

**Idan Avisar of Ramat Hasharon, Israel** reports that [here are the chaps](#) the Colts' cheerleaders wore in the first half on Sunday, as their charges fell way behind, and [here is the revealing, professional look](#) the cheerleaders stripped to in the second half, helping inspire the Colts' epic comeback. "I assume that part of Tony Dungy's halftime adjustments was to instruct the cheerleaders to appease the football gods," Avisar writes.

TMQ complained of big corporations instructing workers to say the overstated "my pleasure" rather than "you're welcome." *Brian of Fairfax, Va.* says this trend began with Ritz-Carlton: "Regarded throughout the service industry as the standard bearer for perfect customer service, Ritz-Carlton puts its employees through intensive hospitality training focused on a list of basic tenets that include responding 'my pleasure' to guest requests, as if the Ritz worker is not merely willing to do what the guest has asked but actually enjoys enjoyed bringing an extra towel, making your next gin and tonic a bit stronger, etc. Copycatting is common in business. Retail operations envy Wal-Mart's supply chain efficiency and pay consultants dearly to try to help them adopt similar processes. Every fast food chain now has a Dollar Menu, all descendants of the Wendy's 99-cent value menu. In the service industry, the idol is Ritz-Carlton, and the wannabes thought wise to learn what they could from the Ritz and apply it to their own operations. Ritz-Carlton even offers courses on service through its [Leadership Center](#). I am sure many corporate big wigs have attended these courses and are now instructing their minions to say 'my pleasure' to customers at every available opportunity." Click on the course "Developing a Dynamic Employee Orientation" at the Ritz-Carlton Leadership Center and you'll find one subject heading is, "Fostering Psychological Ownership by Your Employees." In other words -- we're not going to pay them more, we're not going to give them stock, we're going to make them *think* we've done these things.



They'll serve you well at a Ritz. But do you seriously think it is their "pleasure" to serve you?

TMQ complained that in Hollywood epics about ancient Greece, the sizes of armies and naval fleets are exaggerated compared to the number of people alive at the time. **Andrew Brown of Wadham College at Oxford**, a grad student in Greek history, writes, "Modern scholarship is largely in agreement that the force of Persians at Thermopylae numbered perhaps 150,000. The Persian empire stretched from what is now Afghanistan to Egypt -- including large population centers of the Levant, the Medes, the Persians, the Mesopotamians, the Greek city-states in modern Turkey, the Northern Greeks (such as the Macedonians and Thessalians) who had gone over to the Persian side. Additionally, while the city of Babylon might have contained only a few hundred thousand people, in this period the majority still lived in the countryside. A great deal of academic ink has been spilled on matters of ancient Greek population but the newest, and in my opinion, best study has recently been published by Mogens Hansen of Copenhagen. I met Hansen when he came to Oxford last year to present this work and was blown away by the depth of his inquiry. He placed the population of the ancient Greek world (that includes mainland Greece, the islands and Crete, northern Greece, the Greek cities of Ionia in what is now Modern Turkey, the Black Sea region, northern Libya and Egypt, Sicily, Southern Italy, Southern France and bits of Spain) at a couple million. Next, while it is true that the huge fleet depicted in the Brad Pitt crapfest 'Troy' is

unrealistic, it is not impossible to imagine hundreds of ships being built in the later period of the Peloponnesian Wars. In that period, Athens manned perhaps 100 warships. The polis of Corcyra on modern Corfu had a fleet only slightly smaller than Athens, and Corinth too had a fleet. The island polis of Samos had a fleet. I recommend a recently published book by Carol Thomas, my undergrad mentor back at the University of Washington, "The Trojan War." She does a good job of presenting in not overly scholarly terms the historical outline of the period and the historicity of the legend."

With my Tuesday Morning Quarterback Non-QB Non-RB NFL MVP to be announced next Tuesday, **Heather Roberts of Edmonds, Wash.** asks if I will also choose a Rookie of the Year, Coach of the Year and the rest. No -- unless I can do it on a pass/fail basis. But I have been meaning to note that Peter King of Sports Illustrated, a fine sportswriter, in November lavishly praised San Diego's A.J. Smith as the best front-office man in the NFL. Then in December, a mere month later, King said Mickey Loomis of the Saints was the league's Executive of the Year "in a landslide."



Which of these three is the most likely host of a space alien symbiot?

Finally, it's normal to blink like crazy on television.

Watch even professional newscasters and sportscasters, as they face the camera they blink constantly -- viewers zone the blinking out. Last night during the State of the Union address, George W. Bush, Nancy Pelosi and Dick Cheney were facing the camera. Speaker Pelosi blinked non-stop. The president blinked frequently. *Cheney never blinked.* Check a video. Increasingly I fear that "Richard Cheney" is the host of a slug-like alien symbiot creature that has been implanted in his body and controls his brain.

**Mnday, January 29, 2007**

**Updated: March 21, 3:41 PM ET**

Unconventional Super Bowl wisdom

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By Gregg Easterbrook

The power-rushing team will run, run, run to keep the other side's deep-strike offense off the field. That's what conventional wisdom says will happen in Miami at the Super Bowl. But what if Indianapolis is the power-rushing team?

It's a fallacy that Chicago has a sluggish rush-only attack while Indianapolis uses only a pass-wacky philosophy. Check the postseason stats. Equalizing for Chicago having a bye while Indianapolis did not, and factoring for scrambles, sacks and kneel-downs, in the playoffs the Bears have rushed 39 times for 157 yards per game, while passing 32 times per game for 198 yards; the Colts have rushed 33 times per game for 138 yards, while passing 40 times per game for 246 yards. Stretch back to the regular season and note that Chicago averaged 205 yards passing and 120 yards rushing per contest; Indianapolis averaged 269 yards passing and 110 yards rushing. Deep strike? Bernard Berrian of the Bears had as many catches of 40 yards or more as Marvin Harrison and Reggie Wayne combined. These numbers show a passing edge for Indianapolis, but not an overwhelming differential.

Now think back four years ago to the Bucs-Raiders Super Bowl. Oakland came into that contest with a pass-wacky rep, but so did City of Tampa -- the Buccaneers had thrown 567 times and rushed 414 times in the regular season. All the commentators expected Tampa to air the ball out; instead the Bucs rushed more than they passed, and that was true before they pulled away. Recent history teaches us that back-to-basics game plans win the Super Bowl -- at the big dance, good offensive coordinators call lots of runs and good defensive coordinators call conventional defenses rather than blitzes. The Colts' no-huddle? You can run from a no-huddle -- and run well if you catch the defense with a nickel or dime package on the field, then hurry up to snap it against a light alignment. As for scoring, the Colts put up 427 points in the regular season -- and so, it seems, did the Bears. During the playoffs Chicago has a higher scoring average than Indianapolis, the Bears averaging 33 points per game and the Colts averaging 25 points.

As for the defenses, as noted by Aaron Schatz of Footballoutsiders.com, the Colts surrendered the most regular-season points, 360, of any team to reach the Super Bowl since 1978, when the season was expanded to 16 games and points-surrendered totals rose. Only one team since that season had a bad regular season in terms of points allowed and still won the Super Bowl, the 1983 Raiders. This regular season the Bears allowed only 255 points, a touchdown less per game than the Colts. This surely suggests Chicago is stronger on defense. But in the playoffs, Chicago has allowed an average of 19 points while Indianapolis has allowed an average of 16 points, which sounds like the Colts' defense is peaking at the right time. Plus the further you advance in the playoffs, the more effective *not* blitzing becomes. Consider the defending champion. During the regular season, Pittsburgh blitzed on 32 percent of opposition downs, the highest figure in the league. The Steelers' blitzing numbers fell steadily during the postseason. Pittsburgh blitzed 10 times on 77 Seattle downs in the Super Bowl -- that 13 percent was actually a little lower than the league-wide average for blitzing. And the Colts are going to the Super Bowl as a team that rarely blitzes.

Which leaves it tempting to say that conventional wisdom is backward: The Bears are the offensive team and the Colts are the defensive team, and Indianapolis will feature the run against a Bears defense that has spent two weeks practicing for bombs away. Then again, if the Colts do as expected and go pass-wacky, just remember my column motto is: All predictions wrong or your money back.

But perhaps it's all in the hands of the football gods. TMQ has long called the Chicago team the Ming Ding Xiong, "Bears whose outcomes are decided by fate" in Chinese. I've long called the Indianapolis team the Lucky Charms, owing to their horseshoes. When fate meets luck, the gods must decide.

In other football news, this weekend the next Hall of Fame class will be announced. For years TMQ has contended that the glam-heavy nature of the Hall of Fame -- Canton has 47 modern-era quarterbacks and running backs versus 30 modern-era offensive linemen, even though there ought to be more offensive linemen than offensive backs -- must be rectified by selecting only offensive linemen until the numbers reach rough parity. Based on that premise, this year Canton should take Russ Grimm, Gene Hickerson, Bob Kuechenberg, Bruce Matthews and Gary Zimmerman, the offensive linemen on [the finalists list](#). Year in and year out, the [Hall of Fame selectors](#) clap for quarterbacks and running backs while slighting other positions. In 2005, for example, [the entire Canton class was quarterbacks](#), even though scientists believe only one of the 22

gentlemen on the field during a football contest is a quarterback. The Hall of Fame selectors appear to be honoring players based on how much publicity they received, while they're indifferent to the fact that 90 percent of the action in football occurs away from the ball. Seven of the past 14 Hall of Famers chosen were quarterbacks!

Of the current finalists, Matthews must be first-ballot and Thurman Thomas must be admitted, as he should have been first-ballot last year. Beyond that you can flip coins, since all the gentlemen on the current list belong in garish yellow jackets. Because football is a team game involving large numbers of players, I think the Hall of Fame should take around 10 entrants per year, but that's another argument I lose. There is already a backlog of two dozen players, coaches and executives who should be admitted; at the current pace of about five admitted per class, the backlog gets steadily worse. Defenders of the current system say the Baseball Hall of Fame takes two or three per class, and football teams field twice as many players as baseball teams, therefore four to six is right for the NFL. But baseball is an individualistic sport where a player can be good regardless of the performance of teammates. Football is the ultimate group sport; we're all in it together. This argues for lots of football Hall of Famers, so that individuals are not excessively singled out for team accomplishments. I actually think one reason the selectors choose as few per year as they do is that the induction ceremony is held outside in midafternoon August sun, and grinds on and on as it is. Well, enact a rule that each player's acceptance speechifying is limited to 20 minutes, rather than the current hour or so they receive.



Given that Thurman Thomas is a Canton lock, the Bills' woe-for-four Super Bowl unit will have Jim Kelly, Marv Levy and Thomas in the Hall of Fame, with Bruce Smith a first-ballot lock once he's eligible and Andre Reed, Steve Tasker and Kent Hull worthy candidates. Buffalo's almost-champions might end up with more representatives in the Hall of Fame than most Super Bowl-winning squads. Tasker, in particular, deserves recognition. There is no special-teams player in Canton, though one-third of field position is determined by kicking teams. If Tasker isn't worthy of the Hall of Fame, then no special-teams performer will ever be admitted -- are you OK with that? While the Canton selectors endlessly laud quarterbacks and running backs, they exhibit no appreciation for the role special teams plays in football success. Special-teamers aren't glam-and-hype types, and that takes us back to the superficiality of the choices. Some Canton selectors really know their football, others are posers. When they act as a committee, the result is often lowest-common-denominator decisions.



They come to see quarterbacks inducted -- what about offensive linemen and special teams aces?

The upcoming selectors' meeting will be their first since O.J. Simpson all but confessed, attaching his name to a book describing what it "would" have felt like for him to cut the throat of a young woman. It is revolting that the NFL still has not removed [Simpson's name and image](#) from a place where the honorable are honored. No innocent man falsely accused of murdering his ex-wife and the good man who ran to her aid could lend his name to a book of sadistic filth describing what he "would" have experienced committing the murders. Simpson's disgrace is his own. The National Football League is now disgraced by refusing to act -- Commissioner Goodell, *disgrace* is the word for your inaction regarding Simpson. Roger, stop hiding in your office with the door closed and do something! Now the Canton selectors have their chance to act regarding Simpson, and TMQ doesn't want to hear them whimper about how somebody else should face this problem because it's unpleasant. Do something about it! Make the removal unanimous. Hall of Fame selectors, this is your man-or-mouse moment with the Simpson issue.

And in other football news, this is that deeply annoying week between the championship games and the Super Bowl, when there is no football on television. This week is deeply annoying, not so much because you have to wait for the final act -- I can last another V days till kickoff at VI:XXV ET -- but because the week foreshadows what lies ahead, namely seven months without football. The horror, the horror. To tide you over, below I hand out the coveted "longest award in sports," the Tuesday Morning Quarterback Non-QB Non-RB NFL MVP. This year there's an actual trophy, engraved with the correct spelling! Plus below I muse on the phoniness of NFL contracts and the absurdity of tenths and hundredths of seconds in sports.

**Cheerleader of the Week:** [Pamela of the Minnesota Vikings](#), in this case nominated by me, because I met her last week. I was speaking to a group of Carleton College upperclassmen studying in Washington, and Pamela was one of them. [Carleton](#) is among the country's most selective colleges; it's not every day you bump into NFL cheerleaders with the SAT scores for Carleton. Pamela is a poli sci major with a minor in Japanese and, according to her team bio, her goal is to become a Supreme Court justice. I'd bet on her if I were you -- take Pamela for the Supreme Court and give the points! In addition to being glamorous she's wicked smart, and it's not every day you meet wicked smart NFL cheerleaders. Also, she told me that among NFL cheerleaders it is prestigious to be named TMQ Cheerleader of the Week. If only I'd known, I would have been accepting bribes! Maybe I should start auctioning off this distinction on eBay.



As Prince, child of Minnesota, says: She's got the look. She also has the SAT scores.

**I Wrote This Item In 1,981.48 Seconds:** Tuesday Morning Quarterback rails against the ridiculous sports fad of not only having tenths of seconds showing on the clock, but officials and announcers actually debating how many tenths of seconds something took.

Human senses cannot perceive tenths of seconds! Timekeepers' reflexes are not fast enough for tenths of seconds! Anyway, here is my collection of examples of absurd tenths of seconds in sports in recent memory:

In Game 5 of the NBA Finals, at the end of the first half, the ball went out of bounds with 1.6 seconds showing. Referee Bennett Salvatore confidently instructed the timekeeper to change the clock to 2 seconds. Bennett Salvatore cannot possibly sense four-tenths of a second!

In overtime of the Villanova-Boston College game of the 2006 NCAA men's basketball tournament, 3.5 seconds showed as remaining. A Villanova player caught the inbounds, took a step and scored a basket. Then the clock showed 2.3 seconds. It's pretty hard to believe you can catch the ball, take a step and score a basket in 1.2 seconds -- remember, this must include time for the ball to go through the hoop. Anyway, officials huddled, looked at replays and confidently reset the game clock to 3 seconds. Not only were the officials declaring themselves able to sense eight-tenths of a second -- the time it takes to snap your fingers -- they were saying the Villanova player caught a pass, took a step and scored a basket in only half a second!

At the end of overtime in the George Mason-Connecticut game in the same tournament, officials huddled and confidently changed the clock from 7.1 to 7.3 seconds. These officials could sense a mere fifth of a second!

After Game 3 of the NBA Finals, which went down the wire, the NBA declared that a timing error caused 0.9 seconds too much to run off the clock. Thank goodness it wasn't a one-second error, only nine-tenths of a second.

Two years ago, the Lakers won an NBA playoff game against the Spurs on a play that started with just 0.4 seconds remaining. Los Angeles guard Derek Fisher ran toward the ball, caught it in the air, came down on both feet facing away from the basket, turned around and then launched the shot -- all in *less than half a second*, according to officials who ruled the shot good. (The final shot of a basketball period can count so long as it leaves the player's hand before the clock expires.) The Knicks beat Charlotte in December 2006 when David Lee scored on a tip-in that began with 0.1 seconds on clock. Lee tipped a lob pass into the basket; according to the officials, he did this in less than one-tenth of a second!



Bennett Salvatore sez: So LeBron, how many tenths of a second does your hop-through take?

In last week's Clemson-Duke men's basketball game, Duke hit two free throws to take a 66-61 lead with 12.7 seconds showing. The game ended with Duke winning 68-66 -- not only were seven points scored in less than 13 seconds, *the teams changed ends twice*. Clemson took the inbounds and ran down the floor for a layup, then stole the inbounds pass and hit a 3-pointer. Then Duke took the inbounds and ran the floor in the opposite direction to hit the winning layup at the buzzer, a Duke ballhandler faking around a defender and completing a pass during the sequence. The finish sure was entertaining, and spectators attend sports events to be entertained. But it's just not possible all this happened in 12.7 seconds. After the Clemson 3, the clock showed 1.8 seconds. Officials huddled and changed that to 4.4 seconds. Not only does this require you to believe that the officials who worked the Clemson-Duke game are able to sense tenths of seconds, it requires you to believe Clemson only needed 8.3 seconds to take an inbounds pass, run the length of the floor, hit a layup, steal an inbounds pass, launch a 3-point attempt *and* for the ball to fly a long arc and pass through the hoop.

In the Dallas-Phoenix series of last spring's NBA playoffs, the Suns scored to take the lead with 0.5 seconds showing. Forget that there cannot, in any meaningful sense, actually be half a second remaining: it is inconceivable the timekeeper could be that accurate. Anyway, the Mavericks sailed their inbounds pass out of bounds without any player touching it. Now Phoenix has possession back with 0.5 seconds showing and a one-point lead. All the Suns' inbounds pass has to do is touch any player and the game should end. Surely it takes half a second for a basketball to make contact with a hand. In comes the pass, caught by the Suns' Tim Thomas. Dallas fouls Thomas, but that's irrelevant because the clock expired, right? The officials huddle, stare at replays, use telepathy to consult advanced space aliens who can manipulate the time-space continuum, and order the timekeeper to put 0.2 seconds back on the clock -- sending Thomas to the line and, after his free throws, giving the ball to Dallas for one last, wild inbounds pass as spectators streamed from the arena. By putting 0.2 seconds back on the clock, the officials not only ruled that it only took 0.3 seconds for Tim Thomas to catch a basketball, they ruled that *they could sense the difference between half a second and a third of a second*.

All those examples are from basketball. Football officials do not use tenths of seconds -- but with many football scoreboard clocks now showing tenths, even in high school, how long until the

absurdity of arguing about tenths of seconds extends to football too? While football doesn't count tenths during games, the sport is guilty of an equal absurdity: arguing about *hundredths* of seconds in dash times. To wit:

The Miami Herald said receiver Chad Jackson ran the 40-yard dash in 4.38 at the combine. Mel Kiper Jr. of ESPN said it was actually a 4.37. John Clayton of ESPN.com, February 2006: "The 4.49 dash time of Colorado wide receiver Jeremy Bloom was impressive because he had virtually no preparation. When he runs it again in a month, he can probably post a 4.4." That is, Clayton thought he could actually predict a player's performance down to *nine-hundredths* of a second. ESPN The Magazine ("Published on Earth the Planet") ran an article devoted to the topic of how linebacker James Farrior trains to "maintain the 4.58 speed that helped make him an All-Pro." Not 4.6 speed, 4.58 speed. Mike Florio of Profootballtalk.com wrote that, at the combine, the 40 time of UCLA tailback Maurice Jones-Drew "was adjusted downward from an unofficial 4.41 to an official 4.39 seconds." The time was adjusted by two-hundredths of a second! Two-hundredths of a second matters to atomic clocks, but is an amount of time utterly without meaning in human experience.



**This stopwatch only goes to hundredths of a second -- obviously insufficient.**

Sports Illustrated ran an article about the combine that listed multiple players with 40-yard and shuttle times to the hundredths of a second, including one player as having "turned in times of 4.69 and 4.66." Defensive back Trevis Coley of Southern Mississippi was listed as having run a "4.50" dash. Hey look coach, he's improved his dash time from 4.5 to 4.50! After Dee Webb of Florida ran a 4.41 at the combine, he ran a 4.38 in a private workout. The Tampa Tribune devoted an entire story to how this quicker finish "may help elevate Webb from a second-rounder to a mid-to-late first-rounder." Webb was chosen in the seventh round. Anyway, 4.38 is one half of 1 percent faster than 4.41.

And how fast is that Reggie Bush, anyway? The New Orleans Times-Picayune said Bush ran a 4.37 at the combine, while the New York Daily News said the time was 4.33. Len Pasquarelli of ESPN.com said Bush was hand-timed at 4.41 and electronically timed at 4.37. Gil Brandt of NFL.com said that at USC's Pro Day, Bush had an electronically timed 4.33, and that electronic timing "adds about .08 of a second to the actual time. For instance, if someone ran the 40 in 4.50 seconds electronically timed, it really means he ran it in about 4.42 seconds." In "about" 4.42 seconds? Countered Profootballtalk.com: "Despite a report from Gil Brandt of NFL.com that Heisman winner Reggie Bush put up a 4.33 in Sunday's Pro Day workout, a league source tells us Bush was hand timed at 4.4." The Los Angeles Daily News declared, "NFL teams who hand-timed the races gave Bush times ranging from 4.41 to 4.44." Sports Illustrated: "Reggie Bush was a tad disappointed in running his 40 in 4.33 seconds." What, he expected a 4.32?

**In Parcells' Defense, At Least This Time He Waited Till the Season Was Over to Quit -- New England Fans Will Get That Bill "Mr. Personality" Parcells**

waited three weeks after the Dallas season ended to quit on the Cowboys. When Parcells quit on the Giants in 1991 he waited three months after the team's Super Bowl win to announce his departure. In each case, Parcells did not inform his employers of his plans until after the desirable coaches on the market already had been hired by someone else. In April 1991, desperate for a coach, Jersey/A turned to the underwhelming Ray Handley. Right now the Cowboys, with February approaching and desperate for a coach, are thought to be gravitating toward Norv Turner, who's a nice guy but who is also still on the market because his career record is 59-83-1 (including playoffs). Parcells is no Hamlet figure who can't make up his mind -- there is zero evidence of that in his other behavior. Yet twice he has waited until well into the offseason to walk out on an employer. What's likely going on here is that Parcells wanted the Giants, and now the Cowboys, to have trouble finding someone to replace him. For a coach, business executive or government official with a runaway ego, the ideal outcome is that after he leaves a post, the organization goes downhill -- causing people to say, "Oh, if only Mr. Runaway Ego hadn't left!" At the Giants, Handley inherited a team that had just won the Super Bowl, and went 14-18 in the next two seasons. This caused people to say that Parcells must be a super-ultra genius, since the guy who replaced him did so poorly. Surely Parcells is hoping the Cowboys have a terrible season in 2007, causing people to proclaim they were better off with Parcells.



Alas, poor Handley! I knew him, Horatio.

**Tuesday Morning Quarterback Non-QB Non-RB NFL MVP** Forty-one of the 45 winners of the Associated Press NFL MVP were either quarterbacks or running backs, and no offensive lineman has won the award. Obsession with offensive backs, to the exclusion of the many others on the field, extends from the Hall of Fame selectors to the Associated Press to the barrooms and living-room couches of America. Swimming against this tide, TMQ annually hands out the coveted "longest award in sports," the Tuesday Morning Quarterback Non-QB Non-RB NFL MVP.

This year there is a huge innovation: the award actually comes with an expensive, good-looking trophy. Right now the trophy is on its way to Miami via TMQ Express -- When it absolutely, positively has to get there eventually -- in hopes the award will be handed to the winner. Big stipulation of my award: only players whose teams made the postseason are eligible. My feeling is that if you're going to carry the title "most valuable," you better have created some value. The finalists:

**Jeff Saturday of the Colts speaks about winning the coveted TMQ Non-QB Non-RB NFL MVP award.**

Flozell Adams, Dallas  
Marques Colston, New Orleans  
Brian Dawkins, Philadelphia  
Marvin Harrison, Indianapolis  
Matt Light, New England  
Marcus McNeill, San Diego

Jamar Nesbit, New Orleans  
Trevor Pryce, Baltimore  
Asante Samuel, New England  
Jeff Saturday, Indianapolis  
Bart Scott, Baltimore  
Lofa Tatupu, Seattle  
William Thomas, Philadelphia  
Brian Urlacher, Chicago  
Mike Vrabel, New England  
Brian Waters, Kansas City  
Ty Warren, New England  
Jamal Williams, San Diego

**Second runner-up:** Brian Urlacher. No NFL defender plays with both power and speed better than Urlacher. He meets runners at the line of scrimmage and he covers wide receivers deep. Half a dozen gents had legitimate claims to Player of the Year status on defense this season, and Urlacher was one. He's a little lower on my list than he might be only because he is already well known.

**First runner-up:** Asante Samuel. I took some flak earlier this season for calling him the NFL's best corner, but stand by that assessment. I seem to recall Samuel performing well in three playoff games while Champ Bailey was comfortably seated at home. New England's tremendous defensive performance -- second-best for points allowed -- was made possible partly by an extremely efficient secondary. For the past two seasons, losing Samuel would have hurt New England more than losing any other player except Tom Brady.

**Winner:** Jeff Saturday. This gentleman's game-winning block in the AFC Championship -- shoving outsized, No. 1-drafted defensive tackle Vince Wilfork halfway to the hash marks, allowing Joseph Addai to walk in standing up -- was arguably the single best block any football player has ever made. Jerry Kramer's winning block in the Ice Bowl? Saturday's was better: He didn't just move the man at the point of attack, he *removed* him. One reason the Indianapolis offense has been the league's leader so far in the young century is near-perfect center play. Undrafted out of college, Saturday is one of the best centers ever to snap a football, and is on course for first-ballot Hall of Fame admission. Now a word about the Tuesday Morning Quarterback Non-QB Non-RB NFL MVP Curse, which quietly rivals the Sports Illustrated and Madden curses. Last year Walter Jones won this award, and a few days later his team lost the Super Bowl as Jones had his worst game of the season. Two years ago Troy Brown on New England won, and in the offseason, Brown was waived, though he later resigned. Three years ago the winner was Damien Woody of New England, who promptly departed the lofty Pats for lowly Detroit and has never played as well since. Four years ago Lincoln Kennedy won, and a few days later had a horrible outing as the Raiders were embarrassed in the Super Bowl. Five years ago Alan Faneca won, and a few days later had his worst game of the season as Pittsburgh lost to New England in the AFC title game. (I handed out the award earlier then.) My assumption is that the international media spotlight plus the nonstop mega-babes that naturally accompany winning the Tuesday Morning Quarterback



Jeff Saturday, the Tuesday Morning Quarterback Non-QB Non-RB NFL MVP.

Non-QB Non-RB NFL MVP have a curse-inducing impact. Jeff Saturday -- be really, really careful around the hotel swimming pool in Miami this week, OK?

**What Lies Beneath:** Last week the British Medical Journal, a technical publication, released a survey in which physicians said sewers, not antibiotics or vaccines, were the [greatest public health advance](#) of the past two centuries. Those who live in the favored cities of the West should never take sanitation for granted. The construction of sewage systems in European and American cities, beginning in the late 19th century, dramatically lowered rates of disease, to say nothing of making cities more livable; lowered disease in turn helped Western nations grow more productive and affluent. Today much of the developing world is held back by the fact that its citizens are often sick, and thus not productive. Open conduits of sewage run down the streets of many large developing-world cities; raw sewage pours directly into the Ganges, where bathers are supposed to go for purification rites. In many developing nations the No. 1 need is clean water: clean drinking water, buried sewer systems and modern wastewater treatment plants. The United States appears to have wasted nearly \$1 trillion in Iraq. That sum could have brought modern public sanitation to the 25 largest cities of the developing world, and made America the hero of the world's poor for generations.

While sewers are a wholly serious issue in public-health terms, recently they have become an absurdity in pop culture. Action films have long depended on protagonists crawling through air shafts to reach secret installations; the air shafts are gigantic, though the typical actual air shaft in an actual building is no more than a foot wide at the point it opens into a room. (My favorite air shaft scene occurred in the old Star Trek, when Kirk and Spock were thrown into an alien prison and escaped by popping the flimsy grating off the opening to an air shaft they could walk through -- this spacious, inviting air shaft attached to a *prison cell*.) Now gigantic sewers have become an action-cinema staple. In the television series "Angel," plodding spinoff series of "Buffy the Vampire Slayer," the good vampire Angel was able to go anywhere in Los Angeles during daylight by walking through the sewers, where he could stand up, hold conversations and never soil his trendy clothes. In Sci Fi Channel's recent "Project Viper," under a small California town, impossibly good-looking wisecracking secret agents chased a monster through sewers that were at least 10 feet high. The sewers seemed designed to carry the River Tethys, yet contained only a trickle of water. In "Mission Impossible III," Tom Cruise was able to sneak anywhere in the Vatican by moving through the sewers, which were gigantic, contained only a trickle of water, *had a footpath*, and also had doors that opened to any Vatican room. Sewers do not have doors that open into the rooms of buildings!

**Proud Brother Note:** TMQ's Official Older Brother, Frank Easterbrook, is Chief Judge of the Seventh Circuit Court of Appeals, the federal appellate court with jurisdiction over several Midwestern states. Seventh Circuit authority includes Illinois and Indiana -- that is, my brother has legal jurisdiction over both Super Bowl teams! Surely sports historians will note that this coming Sunday represents only the third time in Super Bowl history that teams from the same federal judicial circuit have met for the championship. Kansas City and Minnesota (Super Bowl IV) are both from the federal Eighth Circuit. San Francisco and San Diego (Super Bowl XXIX) are both



This may look like a sewer entrance. Actually it's a spacious passageway to the secret control room!

from the federal Ninth Circuit. Some history buffs might claim that Super Bowl XXV, Giants versus Bills, involved two teams from the federal Second Circuit, based in New York; but only Buffalo fit that bill as New Jersey, home of the Giants, is in the federal Third Circuit. Given that Frank Easterbrook has legal jurisdiction over this year's Super Bowl teams, here is my advice to the Bears and the Colts. Knowing my brother, do yourselves a favor and don't break any laws, OK?

**NBA Items in As Little Space as Possible:** Reader Dave Scocca of Carrboro, N.C., notes the [new NBA dress code](#) prohibits shorts and sleeveless shirts "any time while on team or league business." He asks, "Does this imply that the process of playing an NBA game is not considered being on team or league business?" Reader Scott Bleiweis of Somerville, Mass., notes the Celtics finally have a [hot-babes dance team](#). He recommends the [diary of Celtics cheerleader Emily](#), hometown Torrance, Calif., who reports that Celtics dancers change costumes four times per game, which means a lot of bags to drag through the snow in January. Fortunately, the costumes are quite small!



Luckily for us -- we mean, for her -- the Celtics dancers' outfits don't weigh much.

**Raiders' Locker Room To Be Renamed "Homeroom," Only Seniors Allowed to Leave the Stadium for Lunch:** When the Raiders hired Jon Gruden at a tender age, TMQ dubbed him Jon "I Was A Teenaged Coach" Gruden. Now the Raiders have hired a coach so youthful he will be to this column Lane "Hey Mom, I Got My Learner's Permit" Kiffin. That Oakland had to reach for a 31-year-old with only a few years of experience as an assistant, and who has never been in charge of anything, shows that nobody, but nobody, wants to work for the once-proud Raiders franchise. [Kiffin's USC bio](#): "In 2005, Lane was named one of the nation's Top 25 recruiters by Rivals.com." Eighteen months from recruiting high-school kids to being a head coach in the NFL! Everybody knows Al Davis is hard to work for. Since Davis fired Bill Callahan just one season after Callahan took the Raiders to the Super Bowl, only the down-on-their luck have even wanted the Oakland helm. Who's going to take this job after Davis fires Kiffin? Anyway, here are changes Lane "Hey Mom, I Got My Learner's Permit" Kiffin will institute next year at the Raiders:

- Homecoming dance for former players.
- Hall passes required during training camp.
- Two weeks of detention for anyone caught with beer.
- No running to the cafeteria.
- Players who appear in two or more games receive handsome embroidered "R" for their jackets.
- Cheerleaders must declare in their team bios if they are going steady.
- Kiffin and Randy Moss refuse to accept each other on FaceBook.



**Hundredths of Seconds in the News:** Last year the New York Times ran a strangely fascinating story about McDonald's using call centers to take drive-through orders. When drive-through customers talk into the

OK, Coach Kiffin, I promise not to talk during class. Now can I start against the Packers?

disembodied box, often they are not talking to an order-taker in the store but one hundreds of miles away who transmits the order back to the restaurant via Internet. The goal? To save the 20 seconds in which the order-taker at the restaurant window does nothing while waiting for one car to pull away and the next to pull up. At the remote call center, the order-taker is switched immediately to whatever McDonald's has a car that just pulled up. A sign on the screen being used by the call-center worker flashes the time of day in the state the order taker is talking to for that moment. It's all pretty eerie, though presumably efficient. Anyway, the Times story declared of a call-center worker, "Software tracks her speed, and every so often a red box pops up on her screen to test whether she is paying attention. She is expected to click on the red box within 1.75 seconds." Within 1.75 seconds -- time-and-motion experts seriously believe they can break down human behavior into hundredths of second.

**Cheerleaders Note:** Though the cheerleaders traditionally travel with college teams, in the NFL only the home team's pep squad appears. The exception is the Super Bowl, at which both team's cheerleaders perform. When New England played Philadelphia in the Super Bowl two years ago in balmy Florida, one of the side dramas was a competition between the two cheerleading squads to see who could wear the least. Last year the Seattle-Pittsburgh Super Bowl pitted a team with cheerleaders against a team without, and the same will occur on Sunday, as the Colts have a cheer squad and the Bears do not. Chicago once had cheerleaders, but disbanded its Honey Bears squad after winning the 1986 Super Bowl, a team official saying at the time that the cheerleaders had gotten "too sexy." Now, seriously, a team wins the Super Bowl and then immediately disbands its cheerleading squad for the crime of being sexy -- how do you suppose the football gods felt about that? This may be a reason it's been 21 years since the Bears returned to the big dance.



The Honey Bears, canned by the Chicago Bears in 1985 as "too sexy," were so overdressed by the cheer-babe standards of 2007 they're practically librarians.

**ESPN Inks TMQ to 10-Year, \$20 Million Contract:** During the offseason, Shaun Alexander signed an "eight-year, \$62 million" contract. NBC Sports headlined, "Seahawks make Alexander richest running back ever." The deal only assures Alexander of two years and \$18 million -- heady enough, of course. This is a good example of the sports press cooperating in the fictional claims of NFL contracts. Since most NFL contracts contain no guarantees or are only partly guaranteed, it's the amount a player is assured of, not fictional paper value that will never be realized, that the sports press should report. But a \$62 million deal sounds a lot more exciting and newsworthy than an \$18 million deal. First overall draft pick Mario Williams signed a record deal that was reportedly as worth "\$62 million." The Williams contract is about \$26 million in guarantees, which is the deal's real value. New York Times headline: "Terrell Owens Says He Is Wiser, Then the Cowboys Make Him \$25 Million Richer." But the deal, announced as worth \$25 million, only guaranteed a little more than \$10 million -- heady enough. The Cowboys wrote the contract to make it practical for them in salary-cap terms to waive Owens anytime after the first season.

Examples of inflated contract values abound in the NFL. Last offseason, Adam Archuleta signed a "six-year, \$30 million" contract that assured him of about \$11 million and one season; whether he will return to the Redskins for a second season is unclear. Julian Peterson signed a "seven-year, \$54 million" contract with Seattle that assures him of two seasons and \$17 million. LeCharles Bentley

signed a "six-year, \$36 million" agreement with the Browns agreement that assured him of two seasons and about \$14 million. Will Witherspoon signed a "six-year, \$33 million" contract with St. Louis that assured him of two seasons and about \$15 million. The inflated-deal champion was kicker Mike Vanderjagt, who signed a "three-year, \$5.4 million" contract with Dallas and was waived after nine months.

At work in fictional contract numbers is the desire of players to seem to have signed for far more than they know they will receive, and the desire of agents to create the appearance of landing a much bigger deal than actually arranged. Often this is accomplished by "back-loading" contracts with huge payments at the end -- though long before the end of the contract is reached, the player will have been waived or renegotiated. Last offseason, Chad Johnson signed a "six-year, \$36 million" contract. Johnson's deal looks big on paper because it specifies that he receive about \$11.5 million total in 2010 and 2011. No matter how well Johnson plays, there is no chance his deal still will be in force unaltered five seasons from now. He will have been waived or renegotiated long before then.

The current reigning King of the Inflated Contracts is Ty Law of Kansas City. In the winter of 2005, Law was with New England and called it a "a slap in the face" when the Pats offered him about \$6 million for the coming season. Law was waived, and claimed victory when he signed with the Jets for what his agent announced was a blockbuster "seven-year, \$50 million" contract. Law was waived by the Jets following the season; the "seven-year, \$50 million" contract proved to be a one-year agreement that paid about \$5 million. Law's "\$50 million" was an unusually goofy example of making contracts seem bigger by back-loading fictional payments the player will never receive; much of the imaginary "\$50 million" was listed as huge lump sums commencing in 2010, when Law will be 36 years old and unlikely to be taping his ankles for any club. After Law was waived by the Jets, he signed with Kansas City for what was announced as a "five-year, \$30 million" contract. That deal only guaranteed one season and about \$5 million. All told, in barely more than 12 months, Ty Law inked contracts with an announced total value of 12 years and \$80 million. These agreements have actually run two years and paid about \$10 million -- heady enough for chasing a ball.

And here's the funniest fictional contract escapade of recent years. Last winter, the Tennessee Titans' braintrust was faced with an odd contract clause that required the team to pay Steve McNair either \$1 million or \$50 million on the eve of free agency. Titans' managers scratched their heads, drummed on the table, gazed off into the distance, took long walks and finally decided that they would rather pay \$1 million than \$50 million. Attention Bank of Sweden! Maybe the Titans' front office should be nominated for the Nobel Prize in Economics. This puzzling clause was part of the fictional contract that enabled McNair's agent to announce, in 2004, that he had signed his client to a breathtaking "six-year, \$100 million contract." In order for those numbers to be realized, Tennessee had to opt to pay him \$50 million instead of \$1 million in winter 2006 -- which was never terribly likely, was it? McNair changed employers to Baltimore, his "six-year, \$100 million" contract ending up lasting two seasons and paying about \$11 million. That is, 89 percent of the contract was fictional.

**Unload Your Sorghum Futures, Buy Stocks:** The Wall Street Journal predicted last week that the Bears-Colts Super Bowl pairing will cause the stock market to rise in 2007. Whenever a team in the original, premerger NFL wins the Super Bowl, the market usually rises that year; whenever a former AFL team or expansion team wins the Super Bowl, the market usually declines. This indicator has held for 32 of the 40 Super Bowls thus far. Because the Bears play the Colts, an

original-NFL victory is assured; the Indianapolis Colts were in the original premerger NFL as the Baltimore Colts.

**Upon Further Review:** Last week TMQ said it was about time New England was called for defensive pass interference in the playoffs -- the second-half flag that put the Colts' on the Flying Elvii 1-yard line was one of the major downs of the AFC Championship. Now many contend the call was wrong. Was New England's Ellis Hobbs flagged for contact or for face-guarding -- blocking the receiver's view while not turning to play the ball? My impression was the call was face-guarding. But as pointed out by readers, including Judith Cohn of Jacksonville, Fla., the rulebook was revised several years ago and face-guarding, for decades illegal in the NFL, is now allowed. The relevant definition is at 8, 2, 5, in the NFL rulebook: "A defensive player beyond the line has his back to the ball during a forward pass. He makes no attempt to catch it but waves his arms in close proximity to an eligible opponent. There is no contact with the receiver. No foul -- legal action by the defender." So unless Hobbs made contact he should not have been flagged. But to that point the Pats and Colts had played 11 consecutive postseason quarters without a defensive interference penalty against New England -- the football gods owed the Colts one!

I admit I had no idea face-guarding had become legal. This makes me wonder, do NFL defensive backs know? Often you see defenders who have no play on the ball nevertheless twist their heads around as the pass arrives, as if trying to avoid the face-guarding posture. Also, if face-guarding is now legal, why aren't defensive backs coached to hold their hands over the receiver's face as the pass approaches?

**My Super Bowl Forecast:** My forecast is: most points wins. Since the Bears flew to Miami early Sunday and the Colts did not touch down till late Monday, I think Chicago has a better chance than recognized: my unscientific indicator holds that arriving first at the Super Bowl improves the odds of victory. (More time to get acclimated and let the glamour wear off, etc.) Then again, Indianapolis has a chance too. I never know what to say when people ask me who's going to win the Super Bowl, since I haven't got the slightest idea -- and neither does anybody else.

**Reader Animadversion:** Got a complaint or a deeply held grievance? Write me at [TMQ\\_ESPN@yahoo.com](mailto:TMQ_ESPN@yahoo.com). Include your real name and the name of your hometown, and I may quote you by name unless you instruct me otherwise. Note: giving your hometown improves your odds of being quoted.

**Next Week:** That Super Bowl thing you might have heard about.

**Sunday, February 4, 2007**

**Updated: February 7, 12:58 PM ET**

Football's popularity will only increase

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By Gregg Easterbrook

Finally the monkey is off Peyton Manning's back! And by saying that I've waited all the way till the second sentence to point out that although the entire big-deal sports world evinced amazement that Indianapolis won the Super Bowl by using the running game, [last week's Tuesday Morning Quarterback](#) forecast exactly this outcome. Specifically: "Indianapolis will feature the run against a Bears defense that has spent two weeks practicing for bombs away." Yea, verily, it came to pass, and I analyze the details below. But first, let's pause for an aside. This is, after all, Tuesday Morning Quarterback.

Could anything exceed the Super Bowl for hype, audience, glamour, cost or public fixation? Could anything exceed today's football at the high school, college and pro levels for disproportionate prominence in a world where 10,000 things matter more than touchdowns? I think something can – and I think that something is football. Football is on its way to becoming more important than it already is, though for reasons that might surprise you.

The least significant way in which football could grow still more important is financial. There's plenty of room for expansion. The popularity of American-style football is likely to grow internationally – gridiron is taking off in Mexico at the moment, for instance. Not only is football fun to watch and to play, most of the world continues to admire the United States and look up to us – it's our foreign policy the world disdains; the American dream remains beloved almost everywhere. As democracy expands and more nations liberalize, more nations will long to become like the United States. And since football resides near the core of American culture, more people internationally will want the sport. They will reason, "America is strong and free and prosperous, America loves football, maybe football somehow helps you become strong and free and prosperous." There's a case to be made that football actually does help society – I'll suggest why in a moment. Anyway, this awareness, spreading globally, will increase the impact of the sport.

The next way in which football might rise in importance is a major increase in viewing access. You think there's a lot of football on television now: You ain't seen nothing yet. Soon Congress might break the cartel arrangement by which only DirecTV can broadcast NFL Sunday Ticket, the paid service that allows a viewer to watch any game. Worst case, the contract that creates the cartel expires in 2012. From then on those who pay a fee will be able to watch any NFL game on any television, computer, phone or other screen device that comes along. The NFL's current cartel arrangement for Sunday Ticket has the economic impact observed in all cartels: Prices are artificially high and demand artificially suppressed. End the Sunday Ticket cartel, and the price of watching any game would rapidly tumble from the current roughly \$500 per season (the Sunday Ticket fee plus DirecTV installation and bundled charges) to a much lower number. If watching any NFL game was \$25 a year, most of the nation's households would sign up. Cell-phone effect would take over, in which falling prices rapidly convert a product from a rich person's luxury to something anyone can have. If most American households could tune in to whatever NFL game was hot – rather than be forced to watch the woofier chosen by the local network affiliate – interest in pro football would rise even more.

The coming democratization of NFL viewing pales, however, in comparison with the coming advent of independent sports television. This is going to be the Next Big Thing in sports media – the sports answer to YouTube. Today, if you wonder how your old high school team is doing, the only way to find out is to make a pilgrimage home and attend a game. The same for the 95 percent of colleges whose teams rarely if ever play on network TV. As broadband and cheap video production proliferate, high schools and non-football-factory colleges will start broadcasting their own games. I'm betting that within 10 years, a significant portion of America's high schools and colleges will be self-broadcasting games over the Web. Your computer will sling the image to your HD television, which by then may be your HHHHD television. You'll click off Fox – 10 years from now, Jack Bauer will have just 24 hours to stop an asteroid from striking the Earth, and his dog will be kidnapped! – and you'll watch your high school play its crosstown rival, or your college play its homecoming game. No traditional network will be involved in either end of the broadcast.

Now we get to the major ways in which football will become more important – ways that concern the evolution of culture and economics. As Michael Mandelbaum wrote in his wonderful 2004 book "The Meaning of Sports," football in the past century has leapfrogged other team games in importance because its structure reflects the modern industrial era. Like big corporations and complex organizations, football requires large numbers of people cooperating. As recently as the stillness before World War II, most Americans made their livings working alone or in small groups in agriculture, craftsmanship, merchandising or owner-operated industry. For the past 60 years, large organizations have dominated the social structure of the West. Large organizations ask large numbers of people of diverse backgrounds to work together cooperatively. Football asks large numbers of people of diverse backgrounds to work together cooperatively. And it's not just the guys on the field who must cooperate. TMQ's Law of the Hidden Moms holds that for every boy who steps onto the high school football field, two people worked behind the scenes to make it possible. In big-college and the pros, it's more like five or six behind the scenes for every one on the field. Other team sports require much less in terms of group commitment. For football to happen, large numbers of people who otherwise would have nothing to do with each other must make a commitment to get along. And that describes a modern economy, doesn't it?

Now consider the direction in which the global economy is headed. In a global world, communication and interpersonal skills grow ever-more important. The explosion in communication, especially, means the successful person of coming decades must be able to cooperate with not just those in his or her immediate field of vision, but people all around the country and all around the world. Daily contact with people all around the country, if not all around the world, is the likely state of affairs for coming generations. Because sports are part of education, there will be rising emphasis on sports that teach interpersonal skills. And that points to more importance for football.

Fans see pumped fists and bumping chests during the game itself, and think football is an event of brute conflict. Obviously, that's a factor. But before the game are extraordinary periods of cooperative work. There's perhaps 1,000 hours of preparation for each hour of play, and almost all the preparation must be done jointly. Football players and coaches spend more hours together, in complex social settings, than the players and coaches of any other sport. The ability to get along with others is more important to football than to any sport. Some star basketball players barely speak to their teammates. In football, even the most renowned star must be a good teammate and must interact constructively with everyone in the locker room down to the lowliest player, or the game simply cannot be won. There's a reason towns view the success of their high school football teams, and cities view the success of their NFL teams, as symbolizing the town's and cities'

prospects – because football cannot happen unless large numbers of people get along. And we're entering a world in which it will matter more than ever that large numbers of people get along. Football teaches that very thing: So expect the sport to grow in importance.

In Super Bowl news, not only were my clothes soaked through to skin -- so much for Gore-Tex being "waterproof" -- and all leather on my person ruined, my fingertips actually were wrinkled by the end of the Purple Rain Game. Tuesday Morning Quarterback doesn't like to sit in the press box. I've long felt one reason sportswriting and sportscasting often leaves so much to be desired is that sportswriters sit in the press box, which is pleasantly enclosed and high up away from the field. They yak to each other, eat the free sandwiches and occasionally pay attention to the game. You've got to be out in the stadium, ideally near the sidelines, to understand what's really happening in a football game. That means sitting in a regular seat, not the comfort of the press box. Anybody out in Dolphin Stadium near the action on Sunday night instantly knew after Manning's interception on a deep attempt on the first Colts' possession that the rain would make deep passing dangerous, so rushing would decide the title. Well, not everybody knew: for example, the Chicago coaches. Loyal readers, I got drenched at the Super Bowl for you! See Purple Rain Game analysis below.

In other sports news, everybody loves Miami, but why? See my speculation below. See below as well for my annual NFL State Standings. Also, once again I make the case for removing clergy of all stripes – or stoles – from sports opening ceremonies, and instead using the nonsectarian "athlete's prayer."

**Stat of the Week No. 1:** Indianapolis became the first dome team to win a Super Bowl outdoors.

**Stat of the Week No. 2:** Bears' rookie return man Devin Hester scored more touchdowns than 13 of the league's top 25 rushers, including the postseason.

**Stat of the Week No. 3:** Hester finished with 1,344 return yards – more yards gained rushing by than all but six NFL running backs in the regular season.

**Stat of the Week No. 4:** Despite Hester's touchdown, Indianapolis outgained Chicago 225 to 147 in total return yards.

**Stat of the Week No. 5:** From the point of Hester's game-opening score, he touched the ball only once more.

**Stat of the Week No. 6:** Discounting the final-minute, garbage-time drive that Chicago used to pad its stats (see below), in the contested portion of the Super Bowl, Indianapolis outgained Chicago 430 yards to 217 yards and 24 first downs to 9 first downs.

**Stats of the Week No. 7:** There were two sets of back-to-back turnovers.

**Stat of the Week No. 8:** Through the playoffs Indianapolis coaches called 164 passing plays and 142 rushing plays (see below).

**Stat of the Week No. 9:** The Colts have won 57 of their past 74 games, a .770 winning percentage.

**Stat of the Week No. 10:** More rain fell at Super Bowl 41 (eight-tenths of an inch) than at all other Super Bowls combined.



He never got the minkey off his back. At least Peyton Manning did.

**Cheerleader of the Week No. 1:** Traditionally TMQ celebrates the Super Bowl with multiple cheerleaders of the week from both teams, but since the Bears have no rally squad, it's all-Indy this year. The first is [Christy](#), a student whose hometown is Louisville. The Colts put less info in their cheerleader bios than any other team, so their isn't much else to say. So the cheerleaders reveal themselves on the sideline rather than in print!



She's from Louisville. The Colts won't say much more than that, but then they don't reveal Peyton Manning's hand signals either.

**Welcome to the Washington Monument Brought to You By**

**Quiznos:** Over the past decade or so, many state governments have messed up their finances through corruption (Ohio), incompetence (Illinois), mismanagement of pension funds (New Jersey) and other offenses. As a result, some states are selling off roads or other items of public property to raise cash. Indiana just sold the Indiana Toll Road for \$3.8 billion; the buyers will operate the road and keep the tolls. The Chicago Skyway was just sold for \$1.8 billion under a similar arrangement. (Note the Chicago Skyway [FAQs page](#) advises that anyone seeking a job with the Skyway organization should first go to his or her alderman's office – the alderman must be furious that the sale will now deprive them of control over patronage no-show jobs.) Illinois is taking bids for its state lottery program, asking \$10 billion for a lottery that had \$650 million in revenues last year.

Fifteen times revenue is a high selling price for a business; maybe buyers figure Illinois residents will become steadily more financially insecure as Springfield lurches from one bumbling governor to the next, and thus more likely to gamble. New Jersey is contemplating selling off the Jersey Turnpike. Let's hope Bruce Springsteen is the buyer!

If the New Jersey Turnpike is sold, please don't tell us the road will lose the famous rest stops with its [quasi-historic names](#) – the Vince Lombardi Rest Stop, the James Fennimore Cooper Rest Stop, the Grover Cleveland Rest Stop. TMQ has always been partial to the [Joyce Kilmer Rest Stop](#); many acres of trees clear-cut to make room for a service area honoring someone who implored others to preserve trees. (Note: Joyce Kilmer was a man; he died in combat at the Second Battle of Marne in July 1918.) Private owners of the Jersey Turnpike are likely to license the service area names. The Woodrow Wilson Rest Stop will become Prez Woody's Rest Stop Brought to You By Pizza Hut.

Here are possible sales the United States government might make to reduce the federal deficit:

- Dulles International Airport in Washington, D.C. Could be operated by a Dubai-based company.
- Fort Knox, Ky. Since the United States Bullion Depository there holds 4,600 tons of gold worth about \$95 billion, at current prices, surely the same wily federal negotiators who drove such a hard bargain on the Gulf of Mexico oil leases could sell that gold for millions of dollars!
- The Grand Canyon. Sold to Chainsaw Dan Snyder's Six Flags company, it could be converted to an amusement park with one heck of a flume ride.
- The United States Air Force. With private security a boom business and many private contractors working for the military in Iraq and elsewhere, why not make it official and privatize the Pentagon? Gated communities for the rich could hire a privatized Air Force to conduct air strikes against rival developers. Some oil sheik or Japanese keiretsu would pay a pretty penny to own the Air Force and then lease it back to Congress after adding cost overruns.
- The White House. Wait, that's been bought and sold several times already.



If the government sells the Grand Canyon, the ad will read, 277 MI, GRT VU

**It's Unbelievable!** Super Bowl week is the week of "proposition" bets, and there should be a prop bet on how many minutes until an announcer calls a play "Unbelievable!" This season Cris Collinsworth said it was "unbelievable!" that Oakland took an interception back for a touchdown against Pittsburgh. Joe Buck said it was "unbelievable!" that Willie Parker ran for 213 yards against the Saints. Al Michaels said it was "unbelievable!" that Tony Romo fumbled the hold in the Seattle playoff game. Daryl Johnston gets the year's award: he said it was "unbelievable!" that Philadelphia jumped offside. You just saw what happened with your own eyes – why don't you believe it?

**Cheerleader of the Week No. 2:** [Monica](#), hometown Indianapolis, is a first-grade teacher.



How come we never had a first-grade teacher who looked like Monica?

**Purple Rain Game Analysis:** The Miami Herald ran a 24-page special Super Bowl sports section the morning following the game. It featured article after article about Peyton Manning and Tony Dungy; articles about Rex Grossman and the Florida players in the game; and lots of stats. In 24 pages, the Miami Herald said almost nothing regarding the strategy and tactics of the game, the downs that mattered or the line play. In this the paper was hardly alone. The New York Times ran a nine-page section on the Super Bowl. It was all Peyton Manning this, Peyton Manning that, plus Prince, rain, stats and a few paragraphs mentioned scoring plays -- nary a word on tactics or what actually happened on the field. Nearly all post-Super-Bowl coverage in print and on television was about atmospheric, celebrities, quarterbacks and what was said at the postgame news conferences. Why the media obsession with writing about postgame news conferences rather than about the contest itself? You can cover the postgame news conferences without paying any attention to the game! Therein lies the problem; TMQ to the rescue.

Going into the Super Bowl, everyone expected the Colts to be pass-wacky. As Tom Weir of USA Today wrote in one of the few Super Bowl stories devoted to the game itself rather than to the pre-hype and post-hype, "Chicago defensive coordinator Ron Rivera said he didn't expect Indianapolis' offense, known for its quick-strike scoring, to be able to pull back and adopt a ball-control philosophy so fluidly. 'Honestly, I really didn't," Rivera said. The story was headlined, **BALL CONTROL STRATEGY BY COLTS THROWS CURVE TO BEARS DEFENSE**. *Why were the Bears so surprised by Indianapolis' rushing?* My prediction that the Colts would go to the run was not pulled out of the air -- it came from a cursory look at game film and statistics. What were Bears coaches looking at in the past two weeks?



TMQ knew he'd get the ball. Every high school coach who saw the weather knew he'd get the ball. Why didn't the Bears know he'd get the ball?

In the Colts' Christmas Eve loss to Houston, a game hardly anyone saw, the Texans frustrated Manning by playing their safeties unusually deep; the deep strike routes just weren't there. All defensive coordinators got the tape, saw Manning's frustration and started playing their safeties deep against the Colts. Chicago safety Chris Harris crashed the line on a couple first-down snaps in the first half, anticipating the run, but otherwise the Bears' safeties were 12-15 yards off the ball all night -- exactly what the Colts have seen since the Texans showed it would take away the Indianapolis deep strike. Yet Chicago seemed taken aback that Indianapolis would be ready for a deep-safety defense. Since the Houston loss, the Colts have known this defensive tactic is coming and adjusted by running more and throwing short. During the regular season, Colts coaches called 592 passing plays and 419 rushing plays, a 59 percent passing share. In the playoffs Indianapolis coaches called 164 passing plays and 142 rushing plays, down to 54 percent passes. And the passes have shifted toward short stuff and flares to the tailback. The Indianapolis regular-season average was 6.0 yards per offensive play, the Colts' postseason average fell to 5.1 yards as the Lucky Charms went with more runs and short passing. Nothing about this was a state secret! It's hardly a surprise that full-time professional sportswriters had no idea what was going to happen in the Super Bowl; that requires actually watching the games! The big surprise was that the Chicago defensive staff had no idea what to expect, either. Maybe it's a sign of a defensive coordinator who spent the Super Bowl interregnum auditing for the Dallas head coaching job.

Now factor in the rain. Leaving Washington on Friday afternoon aboard United's Ted Operated by United for Ted Airlines (see below), I packed my "water-proof" Gore-Tex because I knew the long-term forecast called for rain. Why didn't the Bears' 20-man coaching staff know? Chicago seemed to lack a rain game plan.

Throwing short in rain is OK, but rain makes it hard to throw deep. The farther the ball flies, the more friction from rain slows its movement. It's standard in the rain for the quarterback to think he has delivered a perfect deep strike, only to see the ball come down several yards shy. Five deep passes were attempted in the Super Bowl. The result was one offensive touchdown, one defensive touchdown off an interception, two other interceptions, and an incomplection. Thus deep passing strongly favored the defense over the offense -- just what you'd expect in rain! Chicago's second-half deep passes, both intercepted, were the undoing of the Bears. When it's raining, run the ball! This football folk wisdom should have been available to the megabucks coaching staff of the Bears. Instead, Chicago was surprised when Indianapolis did the smart thing and ran.



I only wanted 2 see u underneath the purple rain.

Then there's the issue of hand size. Manning is tall and has huge hands; quarterbacks with big mitts are better at controlling the ball in rain. Rex Grossman is normal size and has normal-sized hands. Quarterbacks without big hands tend to lose grip on the ball in rain, as they rotate their hands down and point their thumbs at the ground during delivery. Several times Grossman seemed to lose control during delivery, while big-handed Manning never did. And small-handed quarterbacks tend to bobble the snap in the rain -- as Grossman bobbed two snaps, both for painful losses. At the high school level we talk about hand size and its relation to rain, and modify game plans accordingly. Why did the Bears seem oblivious to this?

Though attention focused on the two big-play return touchdowns, what struck me most was that the Colts controlled line play on both sides. With Indianapolis trailing in the second quarter, the Colts offensive line took over the game. No Bear reached Manning until a meaningless sack in garbage time, while 42 rushes for 191 yards against the league's No. 1 defense does not happen unless your blockers play well. I would have voted for the Colts' offensive line as the game's MVP; and was relieved that Jeff Saturday broke the Tuesday Morning Quarterback Non-QB Non-RB NFL MVP curse by having a good game after accepting his award. He's the first winner to receive an actual trophy, which must have broken the curse. Yet if anyone in the sports press mentioned any aspect of line play other than sacks -- the only easy-to-see aspect of line performance -- I missed it.

Lost in the media sauce was the outstanding performance by the Indianapolis defense. The Colts came into the game having surrendered more regular-season points than any team ever to reach the Super Bowl, yet held the Chicago offense to 10 points. Tackling by the Colts was always exact. Part of the rebound by the Indianapolis defense, much mocked at midseason, has been the return of tackling machine Bob Sanders; every good defense needs a tackling machine. On Sunday, good tackling and disciplined position-oriented defense took the Lombardi. Indianapolis won four postseason games with only eight sacks, showing that coverage, pressure and tackling mean as much or more than the sack stats that television announcers extol. Consider the deciding sequence of the Super Bowl. Trailing 29-17, Churchill faced third-and-8 at midfield with five minutes remaining. Indianapolis had a blown personnel switch; as Grossman was calling signals, reserve

tackle Darrell Reid was hustling onto the field. So in effect, Chicago ran this down against a 10-man defense. Grossman threw a designed sideways pass to Thomas Jones -- a puzzling ultra-conservative call with the clock ticking and the Super Bowl on the line. Marlin Jackson made a perfect open-field tackle for a loss. On fourth down, Grossman hit tight end Desmond Clark for what would have been the first, but coverage was flawless and dime back Matt Giordano drilled Clark as the pass arrived, causing the drop that effectively ended the contest.

Had Purple Rain Game not been such an appealing label for the 41st championship, Vanilla Bowl might have served. I've never seen less variety on offense or defense -- and even considering that half the world's sportscasters and sportswriters rarely actually watch games, I find it amazing this is Tuesday and the bland tactics still have gone unremarked upon. No screen pass, reverse, end-around or other deception was tried by either offense. No trick formations by either team. Only two man-in-motion downs in the game, at the end when Indianapolis was killing the clock. Once the Bears set running back Jones wide to go deep. That was it for variation, as all other offensive calls were vanilla.

Defense was vanilla squared. Both sides played conventional 4-3-4 the entire way, no stunting, no presnap movement. Chicago blitzed three times and showed the blitz three other times, then backed out. Indianapolis blitzed once. My guess is this game offered fewer blitzes than any other of the NFL season. Chicago used no mixed or disguised coverages. On every snap the corners played the wideouts one-on-one with safeties deep, linebackers dropping to the slant zones. This conservative scheme prevented Indianapolis from connecting on any long passes, save for the touchdown to Reggie Wayne -- a broken play in which the safeties came up because they thought Manning had crossed the line of scrimmage. Because the coverage was so conservative and vanilla, the Colts' star receivers had an average night while the flare pass to Joseph Addai was open: The best thing Manning did was simply check down to Addai on third downs. By the eighth or ninth flare completion to Addai, I was wondering when the Bears defense would adjust. Answer: never.

There was a lot of talk before the Super Bowl about Chicago trying to figure out exactly what Manning's chicken-dance signals mean. Then Manning made no hand-signals on most plays, because there was no Chicago stunting to counter. Three times Brian Urlacher signaled that he'd gotten Manning's read and wanted the Bears to shift assignments. On these three downs Indianapolis averaged five yards, same as on the Colts' other downs. Chicago seemed to expect Manning to do his chicken dance a lot, then steal signals. Turns out the dance is exactly what it seems to be -- a response to a defensive shift -- and when the Chicago defense didn't move, Manning didn't dance. For its part, Indianapolis also was in its conventional 4-3-4 defense all the way, no presnap stunting, no fake blitz, no disguised coverages. Both defenses sold out to stop the deep-strike pass, and both succeeded. The Indianapolis offense adjusted and went short, while the Bears didn't start throwing short until they were behind in the fourth quarter, which is kind of the reverse of the way you're supposed to run an offense.

Speaking of adjustments, after kicking directly down the center to Devin Hester to open the Super Bowl and watching his touchdown return, the Colts' special teams squib kicked or angle kicked for the remainder of the contest. The result was Hester having just one



Hey look, Chicago is finally moving -- at last a chance to do my chicken dance!

more return for 3 yards. I don't know why Indianapolis had to watch Hester take one to the house to realize he's as good as advertised. At least the Colts adjusted.

**Super Bowl Sweets and Sours:** Here's a hidden play -- the kind that never make highlight reels, but stop or sustain drives. Trailing 16-14 with four minutes remaining in the first half, the Bears faced third-and-3 on their 43. Jones carried off tackle and was brought down after 2 yards on a perfect stop by Gary Brackett. Then Chicago punted on fourth-and-1 from their own 45 -- what might have been different had the Bears gone for the first?

Now it's still 16-14 and Indianapolis faces third-and-2 on the Chicago 17 with 39 seconds showing in the first half. The Colts run up the middle and Urlacher makes the stop for no gain -- the sole big play of the night for the storied Urlacher. The storied Adam Vinatieri honks the short field-goal attempt. What hurt here is that Indianapolis was holding two timeouts, and had called the run to position the ball where Vinatieri likes it. With two timeouts, why weren't the Colts aggressive here in trying for six?

Now it's still 16-14 and Indianapolis faces third-and-goal on the Chicago 10 in the third quarter. Manning threw to Dallas Clark to the 2. Tony Dungy challenged whether Chicago had 12 players on the field, which Chicago did not, and sportscasters questioned why the Colts would waste a timeout on this point. If you'd been in the stadium instead of in the pressbox you'd have known! Dungy was summoning his staff together to decide whether to kick or go for it; since he would spend a timeout anyway, he might as well challenge, which creates a longer delay than a standard timeout. After losing the challenge, Dungy sent in the field goal unit, and the kick made it 19-14. The Bears were called for running into the kicker. Now came an overlooked choice. Dungy's dilemma was whether to decline the penalty and take the points, or accept and make it fourth-and-goal on the Chicago 1. That's a pretty attractive down for a team that is rushing well, especially since a failed rush on fourth-and-goal would leave Chicago pinned on its 1. Indianapolis won, so Dungy's decision to leave the points on the board looks sound. Had the Bears rallied to win, on Monday you would have heard about how this decision was an ultra-colossal blunder.

Now the most important sequence of the Super Bowl: Trailing 19-14 midway through the third quarter, Chicago moves smartly to second-and-1 on the Colts' 45. The call is a play-fake attempt for a deep pass -- Grossman sprints backward 11 yards, falls down, then is tagged to make it third-and-12. Considering this was a designed as a deep-pass attempt, the Chicago litany for deep passes really was four calls resulting in two interceptions, one incomplection and an 11-yard loss. Bears coaches: IT'S RAINING, RUN THE BALL! (Rain was worst in the third quarter.) On the next down, Grossman fumbled the snap and again was tagged for a loss. Consider: The Bears went from second-and-1 in Indianapolis territory to punting on fourth-and-23.

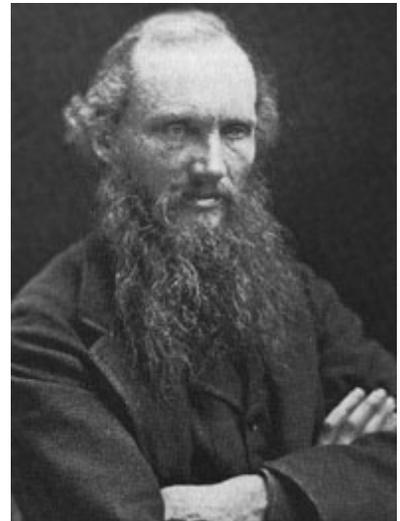
Now it's Indianapolis 22, Chicago 17 early in the fourth quarter and the clock is about to strike midnight on Chicago's season. The Bears have first-and-10 on their 38. There's plenty of time. Chicago trails by less than a touchdown. IT'S RAINING, RUN THE BALL. Deep pass right; Grossman pumps as the receiver runs a stop-and-go; Grossman throws; intercepted and returned for a touchdown. *The Indianapolis corner did not bite on the pump.* Nickel back Kelvin Hayden -- for whom the kickoff temperature was 293 K -- stayed deep the whole time. Did Grossman even look before throwing it to the player who should henceforth be known as Lord Kelvin?

Now it's Indianapolis 29, Chicago 17, with the Bears having first-and-10 at midfield with six minutes remaining and holding one timeout. Chicago's sequence: a short incomplection to the tight end, short check-down to the tailback, sideways to the tailback for loss of yardage, short incomplection to the tight end, Colts' ball and game. With the Super Bowl on the line and plenty of time remaining, Chicago here called four consecutive unimaginative plays. Reverse? Crossing pattern? Anything unexpected?

Finally, it's Indianapolis 29, Chicago 17 with 1:42 remaining and the Bears on their 16. Chicago coaches called five checkdown passes and a draw, Super Bowl over. Sure the Bears should have been throwing short earlier. But now it's the endgame, why are you padding Grossman's stats instead of going for broke? Chicago did not even attempt to score on its final possession -- a fitting conclusion to a blown Super Bowl opportunity.

**Super Bowl Leftover Points:** I've always liked the colorful meshuggass of Cirque de Soleil, but the Super Bowl crowd was not amused. Silence -- not even polite clapping -- as the performers exited following their multimillion-dollar pregame show. The show itself seemed shoddy dashed-off stuff by Cirque de Soleil standards; note the circus' [Web site](#) makes no mention of the Super Bowl appearance, seen by more people than all previous Cirque de Soleil performances combined. Hey Cirque de Soleil, if you're not proud of your own work, don't take the money and then make us watch, OK?

This year's flyover was by the Thunderbirds, the Air Force's F16 stunt team. Seconds before they appeared, the scoreboard flashed a cool view from the lead plane's camera looking backward toward the formation. By the start of the fourth quarter, the Thunderbird pilots were on hand and introduced to the crowd -- [two were women](#). This really must be the 21st century! Flying with the Thunderbirds or the Blue Angels, the Navy's aerial stunt team, is pretty much top of the pyramid in aviation -- more challenging and at least as dangerous as combat flying.



Lord Kelvin did much to clarify the science of thermodynamics, but even he couldn't explain why Rex Grossman threw directly to Kelvin Hayden of the Colts.

Indianapolis had cheerleaders and Chicago had none. Let the record note that with rain in the first half, the Indianapolis cheer-babes wore minimalist summer outfits. During driving rain in the second half, they added chaps but stayed with tank tops. Outstanding cheerleader professionalism!



Nearly an inch of rain did not deter their professionalism, and the football gods reward that sort of thing.

Everybody liked the halftime show by The Artist Formerly Known as the Artist Formerly Known as Prince. Three consecutive Super Bowl halftime shows have gone well, which is a modern-era record, according to the Elias Sports Bureau. But though the show went well, something was eerie about Prince himself. He appeared, sang, then vanished beneath the stage on an elevator without ever showing any facial expression or addressing the crowd. This was by far the largest audience before which Prince has ever performed -- probably, considering global ratings, the largest audience before which anyone has ever performed. Yet for all we knew, the purple figure on the stage was an animatronic Prince copy.

On the religion side, during a TV timeout the scoreboard showed a short video in which former Baltimore Colts player Bill Curry declared, "If you don't believe in God or prayer, you do on the sideline of the Super Bowl." God does not care who wins football games! Accepting the Lombardi Trophy, Tony Dungy declared that it was a good night not only because both teams were led by African Americans but both he and Lovie Smith are "Christian coaches." I understand Dungy was trying to say that both he and Smith have high standards and believe in something larger than themselves. But God does not care who wins football games! See the item on the Athlete's Prayer.

**Why the Estate Tax Helps You Live Longer:** I just heard a radio commercial for the Accuquote life insurance service which declared, "We guarantee your money back even if you don't die." If I don't die? Sign me up, and you can keep my money! On this subject, Congress continues to debate whether the estate tax will go out of existence in 2010 as currently scheduled, then come back into existence in 2011. Today the first \$2 million of an estate is exempt from taxation, meaning only about one estate in 100 is taxed. In 2009 the exemption rises to \$3.5 million and fewer estates will be taxed. In 2010 there will be no estate tax. Then in 2011 the tax would return with a lower threshold than today, imposed on any estate above \$1 million. This goofy schedule is the result of legislative sausage-making during a tax-cut bill a few years ago. What this boils down to: from now till 2009, death is lightly taxed; then in 2010, not taxed; then in 2011, heavily taxed. Economic theory holds that society gets less of whatever it taxes. That's why taxes on income and capital should be as low as possible (so we don't discourage labor or investment) while taxes on pollution and energy use should be as high as possible (we want less of these things). Therefore taxing death is good – we'll get less of it! With estate taxes declining from now till 2009, there is increasing incentive to die in these years. With no estate tax in 2010, that's a really great year to die. With a high estate tax in 2011, death should be discouraged that year.

**This Item Sponsored by the Miami Chamber of Commerce:** Most television viewers pay only passing heed to the question of where the Super Bowl is played. To reporters, corporate managers, celebrities, customers of the NFL and its owners and any others with a reason to attend the game, location is key. The sports-nut and media worlds have fallen all over themselves praising the location of this year's Super Bowl in Miami. This reflects two factors – the junketeering nature of

many Super Bowl trips, and the status of Miami as America's Sexiest City, replacing New York and Los Angeles, previous holders of that distinction.

First, junkets. This year more than 3,400 journalists were accredited to cover the game, and only a small fraction will contribute any insight that could not have been gleaned from watching on television. (Note to ESPN accounting department: My trip was NOT a junket, it was ESSENTIAL that I be on-scene to develop this item.) Journalists from all over the world attend to "cover" the Super Bowl. A few years ago at a Super Bowl event I sat between a South Korean reporter and a woman from Danish television who had never seen an American football game; Al Davis almost hired her to coach the Raiders. This year Al Jazeera was accredited to cover the Colts-Bears collision. The multitude of journalists present is unnecessary, but that's 3,400 junkets to a desirable destination, and human beings love junkets – the press bitched, bitched, bitched about the last two Super Bowls being in Detroit and Jacksonville owing to low junket appeal. And junkets hardly are limited to those accredited to swarm the locker room after the game. In recent years, many television stations have begun sending reporters to cover the "atmosphere" at the Super Bowl city. All four local news shops of Washington, D.C. – ABC, CBS, Fox and NBC – sent two reporters plus camera crews to Miami to cover atmosphere. They won't even attend the game, they're just doing "standups" from South Beach and outside parties. Beyond that many thousands of corporate junketeers travel to every Super Bowl. Some don't have tickets, but do have an excuse for a nice junket. Thousands of people who aren't on a company expense account, and don't have tickets, migrate to the Super Bowl city just to mill around and soak up the feeling. It's not a junket when you pay for it yourself, but the principle is the same.

Then there's the specific appeal of Miami. Once New York was America's Sexiest City – skyscrapers, Times Square, leggy showgirls, money, power, jazz, the best night clubs. Then Los Angeles became America's Sexiest City – the cinema crowd, the Hollywood sign, the movie megababes and matinee idols, power lunching on food you can't identify, mega-mansions in Malibu. Now the title of America's Sexiest City is held by Miami. (I'm skipping Las Vegas because, though it has the highest concentration of beautiful naked women of any location in the world, and also more prurient sex-linked themes, I find Vegas a ridiculous place utterly lacking a sense of culture.) As TMQ noted earlier this season, one reason so many sports types predicted great things for the Dolphins this season – despite unsettled quarterbacking, an middling roster and a coach with a track record of being a quitter – was that people wanted excuses for expense-account trips to Miami.

Miami is sexy, physically: the architecture has a voluptuous aesthetic and the ubiquitous use of pastel colors against the sky and water give Miami a visual allure no other metropolis possesses. South Beach has become the country's No. 1 babes-on-the-beach destination, surpassing California; future historians will puzzle over that. South Beach is the best hunk-watching destination in the world, too – at any given moment on South Beach, there are more really good-looking young men and women than you would have guessed lived in the entire country. The Latin culture that infuses Miami's night club and music scene is sumptuous and sensual. What follows is a generality, but one that I think is reasonably fair: Latin culture views the pleasures of the Earth (sex, drinking, dancing, music) as good things to be embraced, while the attenuated Puritanism that still underlies mainstream American sociology views these things as, if not exactly bad, traps to be avoided. The Latin view: Life is short and God wants us to enjoy it. The neo-Puritan view: Life is a burden God wants us to overcome. Obviously self-indulgence can backfire or cause harm. But I've long thought the multitude of ways in which human beings can experience delight is one of the proofs of the existence of God. Natural selection did not need to make sex or food or wine or music or art or beauty pleasurable, yet they are. Perhaps our ability to enjoy life is a gift from a friend. Miami as a

city projects the message that it is OK to enjoy life, and though Miami has many problems – especially persistent areas of poverty – in our too-short lives it is pleasing to be somewhere that having a good time is not frowned upon.

Parked on cruise ship row near South Beach was the [Voyager of the Seas](#), one of the world's largest cruise ships. At 138,000 tons, the *Voyager of the Seas* displaces more than a *Nimitz*-class supercarrier, and boasts such niceties as a seagoing ice-skating rink, rock-climbing wall and nine-hole golf course. But if you're going to spend \$600 million of a cruise ship bigger than the largest aircraft carrier, couldn't you come up with a better name than the *Voyager of the Seas*? It might as well be called the *Boat That Floats*.

**A Cosmic Thought:** Cosmologists believe the Big Bang happened about 14 billion years ago, matter and energy filling the void in a process of unfathomable majesty, all the matter and energy of 100 billion galaxies coming from – well, we'll get back to you on that. For the first few hundred million years, it is thought, the firmament was dark: Matter was scattered and nebulae or stars had not yet formed, so there was no source of light. This assumption makes eerie the 3,000-year-old description, from Genesis, of the condition just after the creation: All "was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters."

Cosmologists believe that initially almost all the matter in the universe was hydrogen – the main ingredient in water – and that it was moving outward from the point of the Big Bang at fantastic velocity, as if propelled by supernatural wind. At any rate, last month the Spitzer Space Telescope, which orbits the Earth and looks toward the deep cosmos on infrared wavelengths, photographed what might be the [first stars ever to form](#). They appear to have been gigantic suns 1,000 times the mass of our Sol, and to have provided the first light that shown upon creation. That their light can still be seen from the edge of the observable universe is eerie, too.

**Family Jewels Strangely Unimportant to NFL Coaches:** The resignation of Bill Cowher reduces by one the number of NFL coaches who routinely stuff their clipboards down their pants. Rams coach Scott Linehan continues to stuff his clipboard down his pants, as does Rams defensive coordinator Jim Haslett. How did this strange practice become a football custom? Aren't coaches worried about their reproductive health? Any of the dozens of flunkies and factotums on an NFL sideline would be happy to hold the coach's clipboard. And just how *do* you thrust a clipboard down the front of your pants on a regular basis without unpleasant consequences? Since the league now enforces a strict dress code having to do with NFL Properties wear, you'd think a fashion rule about clipboards and slacks would be in order.



Is this what God saw when the universe was new?

**The University of Maryland University College Offers a Bachelor's of Redundancy in Redundancy Studies:** Reader Rob Ciccarella of Fort Thomas, Ky., notes there is a [University of Maryland University College](#). I'd much rather attend the University College of a university than go to some College University of a college, wouldn't you?

Academia note: it's come to my attention that at magnificent Davidson College, the Princeton of the South, they do your laundry for you! Maybe other colleges offer this, but it's the first time I've heard of such a collegiate feature. [Here](#) is the Davidson laundry policy. This is such an attractive benefit it seems amazing the sign at the main gate does not announce, DAVIDSON COLLEGE, ESTABLISHED 1837, WE DO YOUR LAUNDRY." This message should be emblazoned on the Davidson crest – though in Latin, of course. The crest would read, *Universitas Davidsonsia, MDCCCXXXVII, Nos Tersus Vestri Induviae Vobis.*

**The Athlete's Prayer:** Every year between the college bowls and the Super Bowl, there's at least one major game that begins with some unctuous minister leading a prayer for victory. As a churchgoing Christian, I wince whenever I hear clergy appeal to the divine for success in sports. God doesn't care who wins games, while many sports prayers boil down to, "Lord, help me crush my opponent." For that matter public prayer contradicts Jesus, who taught, "Whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Amen I tell you, they have received their reward. When you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will reward you." (Jesus often said of religious hypocrites or the rich that they "have received their reward," meaning they will not ascend to heaven – everything they are ever going to get, they already have.) At sports events, dedications and at the openings of legislatures, Christians routinely violate Christ's teaching regarding public prayer. Considering the rabbi Jesus even opposed prayer in synagogues, it can be argued that Christians contract Christ when they pray together in churches. Each time I read of Christian fundamentalists or evangelicals demanding prayer in public schools, I wince anew, since it suggests they know little about the actual ministry of their Redeemer. But don't get me started on ways in which Christians ignore the teachings of Jesus.

While prayer for victory in sports is offensive, there seems nothing wrong with nonsectarian prayer for inner strength during competition. Years ago for the ecumenical Web site [Beliefnet.com](#) – which is by a huge margin the best destination on the Internet for anyone interested in any faith – I composed a nonsectarian athlete's prayer:

The Athlete's Prayer

**God (or Adonai or Allah), let me play well but fairly.**

**Let competition make me strong but never hostile.**

**In this and in all things, guide me to the virtuous path.**

**If I know victory, grant me happiness;**

**If I am denied, keep me from envy.**

**See me not when I am cheered, but when I bend to help my opponent up.**

**Seal it in my heart that everyone who takes the field with me becomes my brother.**

**Remind me that sports are just games.**



Get that clipboard out of your pants!

**Teach me something that will matter once the games are over.  
And if through athletics I set an example – let it be a good one.**

Two notes. First, there have been centuries of debate in the rabbinical, pastoral and imam's traditions regarding what can be asked of the divine; I would argue that "in this and in all things, guide me to the virtuous path" is the essence of prayer. Second, you might wonder, why pray for happiness in victory -- aren't all victors happy? If only! It's amazing how often the victorious don't seem to enjoy their triumphs: rather complain that the score wasn't higher or the accolades louder or the opponent humiliated. A basic reason people engage in sports is for that happy moment when victory is won and all involved can hug and dance and spend the next 24 hours on cloud nine. In athletics and other aspects of life, too many work arduously to win, then do not enjoy their triumphs. Therefore the humble athlete prays that God will grant happiness.

**Time to Use Ours Heads About Helmets:** If you haven't already, you need to read the two recent New York Times articles by Alan Schwarz: [one on whether brain damage](#) linked to playing injuries contributed to the suicide of former Eagles safety Andre Waters, the other on [whether severe playing concussions](#) have caused brain damage to former Patriots linebacker Ted Johnson. Various studies suggest that former NFL players have shorter life expectancies than the population as a whole, while suffering higher rates of degenerative conditions. So far most attempts by former NFL players to sue for damages over their health circumstances have not been looked on favorably by courts, owing mainly to the "assumption of risk" doctrine that applies to adults who voluntarily do perilous things for pay. But something tells me these brain-injury cases are the beginning of the end for the NFL not having legal responsibility for long-term health harm to players. And should be the beginning of the end.

Obviously football is a contact sport. But the pro and big-college versions of the game are run by wealthy, comfortable people who never place themselves at any risk, while urging young, impressionable, eager performers to prove their manhood by playing through injury and pain. This is not healthy, in many senses of the word. Every big-college and NFL player knows there is a stigma attached to saying, "Coach, it hurts, I'm worried about going out there." The rich, comfortable people who run the NFL and big-college football also know it is common for fabulously fit young athletes to consider themselves immortal. The rich, comfortable people in charge know this isn't true – they've seen the conditions of 50-year-old former players who once believed themselves immortal. But the rich, comfortable in charge don't warn the young, impressionable people, and therefore allow them to come to harm that might have been avoided. This does not sound like responsible behavior.



Earl Campbell, who now suffers panic disorder, is among many once-seemingly-invincible great athletes dealing with long-term health consequences of football collisions.

Maybe it is time that courts said legal liability is engaged; or better, for football to reform itself. If one team tried to have stricter medical-protection policies while others did not, that team would be at a competitive damage – reform must come across the sport. NFL and big-college conferences. Do this now, on your own, before some court imposes an outcome on you.

And for goodness sake, for those programs that still haven't switched to the new Riddell Revolution [anti-concussion helmet](#), or an equivalent, get wise! My kids' high school has been all-Revo for three years; we held a fundraising drive to go Revo, having seen the concussion research that came years before the current wave of concern. The pros and college, where money is not an issue, simply should not allow players on the field unless wearing a Revolution helmet or another with an equivalent anti-concussion design. Some players don't want to go Revolution because they don't like the look of the alien-monster bulging ridge on the new helmet designs, preferring the traditional perfect-globe look. So NFL owners and college conferences, just enact a rule that forces everyone to wear anti-concussion headgear. For some high schools, the price of new helmets is an issue: the Revo costs \$170, versus \$143 for the standard Riddell VSR model. Adams and Schutt standard models cost less still, while many high schools use reconditioned standard helmets that sell for as little as \$50. But school boards, the best helmets are a lot cheaper than losing a major lawsuit. For that matter, why do Riddell, Schutt and Adams even still sell football helmets that lack anti-concussion design features? Helmet manufacturers and sports supply chains should agree jointly to cease commerce in helmets without the best medical design. You know there's a lawyer out there planning the lawsuit that will force them to do so.



Many NFL players have switched to an anti-concussion helmet such as the Riddell Revolution. Why isn't it mandatory for every football jones to have an anti-concussion helmet on his head?

**Cheerleader of the Week No. 3:** [Hilari](#), hometown Indianapolis, whose favorite quote is, "Live like there is no tomorrow, love like you'll never get hurt and dance like no one is watching." Hilari, hope you liked Miami!

**Can "Fox News Operated by CNN" Be Far Behind?** All travelers are driven crazy by affiliate airlines like the recently discontinued Song, which looked and quacked exactly like its parent Delta but claimed to be a different company, and commuter-affiliate airlines that use the logos, livery and reservation systems of their parent airlines but are legally distinct. For instance, I just used the United Web site to book a United flight from Washington to Syracuse (New York, not Greece). But it's not on United, it's on United Express Operated by Trans-States. It's on United Express Operated by Trans-States even though the plane will bear the color and logos of United, the flight crew will wear United uniforms, United central dispatch will control the plane's movements. Knockoff carriers like Song and commuter airlines run by affiliate companies are structures used to pay pilots, gate clerks and others less for the knockoff carriers and commuter airlines than for the parent airline. United created Ted, a knockoff company, for this



Hilari may hail from the Midwest, but she has the Miami worldview.

purpose: Ted planes look and quack like United planes, yet the yellow word Ted on the tail means the flight crews earn less. Initially Ted and Song were different from their parents by offering no in-flight service; since United, Delta and all major carriers now offer no more than peanuts on any flight, that distinction has faded. Anyway, to fly to Miami for the Super Bowl, I boarded an Airbus 320 that was listed as Operated by United for Ted. So United spun off Ted to be different from United, and now United is operating Ted.

**Disclaimer of the Week No. 1:** A friend gave me a lift in a new BMW 545, which has a screen that says, "Safe operation of vehicle is the driver's responsibility." The driver must click "accept" or the car won't go into gear. Since there is no other option – no box to click that says "I plan to drive like a lunatic" – presumably this disclaimer is legally meaningless.

**Disclaimer of the Week No. 2:** Reader Chris Flood of Columbus, Ohio, reports that the DVD case of the movie "Crank" warns, "Strong violence, pervasive language, sexuality, nudity and drug use." Also offered on the DVD is an optional sound track that eliminates swear words. The teaser says, "Family Friendly Audio! Enjoy the film without the expletives." Flood observes: "So families are now free to enjoy the strong violence, sexuality, nudity, and drug use without worrying that the children will be exposed to expletives."

**Disclaimer of the Week No. 3:** Last week I enrolled in National Rental Car's Emerald program, and first had to click "I accept" to a record-setting 12,109-word disclaimer. A typical Atlantic Monthly cover story is about 10,000 words. Much of the disclaimer was in all-caps, so as to discourage reading: When legal documents contain sections in all-caps, that doesn't mean "this section is more important," that means, "we hope you can't read this section." Included was a statement telling me that if I wanted a record of what I just agreed to, "print a copy of the Terms now. I understand that I will not be able to come back later and print a copy of the Terms in their entirety." So not only must you accept 12,109 words – you're not allowed to check on what you agreed to!

**Another Government Hand in Your Pocket:** In 2005, TMQ complained that it is ridiculous that the guy with the over-glamorized title Secretary of the Smithsonian earns nearly \$1 million a year, despite having virtually no responsibilities beyond deciding where to eat lunch. Last week the Smithsonian's Inspector General filed a report saying the Secretary of the Smithsonian, Lawrence Small, earned \$884,733 in 2006 – more than double what George W. Bush was paid – while two other Smithsonian officers earned more than \$400,000. The Smithsonian likes to claim to be a private organization whose CEO should be paid like a corporate officer. But the Smithsonian is a federally chartered monopoly operating on federal subsidies. In the current fiscal year, the taxpayer is providing \$644 million to the Smithsonian, 85 percent of which is for salary and expenses. The Smithsonian isn't remotely like a private business in the sense of risk-taking or any need to please customers to insure revenue. In turn, Congress makes all the big decisions about Smithsonian management, Lawrence Small being just a figurehead. So why do federal taxpayers, with a median family income of \$55,000 a year, pay this guy nearly \$1 million a year? Any competent civil servant could run the Smithsonian.



This car offers the world's most technologically advanced high-performance disclaimer.

**Final State Standings:** Annually Tuesday Morning Quarterback compiles NFL State Standings, based on where teams actually play – the Jets are a New Jersey team, the Redskins are a Maryland team and so on. Below are the final 2006 state standings. Note that once again four of the five traditional hotbed states for high-school recruiting and NFL draft choices – California, Florida, Ohio and Texas – finished the year with losing records. California, Florida, Ohio and Texas combined to fail to win a postseason game. Of the traditional hotbed recruiting and drafting states, only Pennsylvania finished the year with a winning record or a postseason victory. And note that both top spots are occupied by rust-belt states, not sunbelt states.

Indiana 16-4

Illinois 15-4

Massachusetts 13-5

Louisiana 11-7

Pennsylvania 19-15

Colorado 9-7

Washington 10-8

Maryland 18-15

New Jersey 18-16

Missouri 17-16

North Carolina, Tennessee and Wisconsin 8-8

California 23-26

Texas 15-17

Georgia, New York 7-9

Florida at 18-30, Minnesota at 6-10 and Ohio at 12-20

Arizona 5-11

Michigan 3-13

**Jeff Saturday of the Colts speaks about winning the coveted TMQ  
Non-QB Non-RB NFL MVP award.**

**Jeff Saturday's Trophy:** Last week at media day before that Super Bowl thing you might have heard about, ESPN.com executive editor Kevin Jackson presented Jeff Saturday with the impressive actual trophy that now accompanies the coveted "longest award in sports," the Tuesday Morning Quarterback Non-QB Non-RB NFL MVP. If you look closely at the trophy in the photos or the ESPN Motion clip of Saturday, you'll see the new full name is ESPN.com's Tuesday Morning Quarterback Non-QB Non-RB NFL MVP, making the title even longer. Maybe next year it can be the Entertainment and Sports Programming Network Web site's Tuesday Morning Quarterback Non-Quarterback Non-Running Back National Football League Most Valuable Player Award, which would pretty much require two trophies side-by-side.

**Eliminate the Dime!** Every now and then someone launches a crusade against the penny, which clogs America's pockets, purses and cash-register drawers. One cent is a unit of currency so small as to be meaningless; the sole role of the penny is to cause needlessly complex prices such as \$19.82. That shopkeepers leave bowls of pennies by checkout lines reveals the stark truth that the modern penny is of no value. The absurdity of the existence of the penny got worse in 2006, when rising copper prices meant the United States Mint spent 1.4 cents for every penny it produced. Since the Mint made nine billion pennies last year, United States taxpayers lost \$36 million on penny

production. Not only are pennies an annoying inconvenience – they are a net financial loser whose existence costs you money!

Tuesday Morning Quarterback would go further and eliminate not just the penny but the nickel and dime. The quarter is the smallest unit of currency that has significance in modern commerce. In inflation-adjusted terms, today's dime has about the same value as a penny in 1920 – and back then there were already people crusading to eliminate the penny! Pricing all goods in increments no smaller than 25 cents would simplify transactions and eliminate the need for Americans to carry coins that are, for all intent and purpose, worthless. Abolishing the penny, nickel and dime would eliminate the need for businesses and banks to process large amounts of coins with little net value. Eliminating this transaction cost would allow consumer prices to decline slightly, thus increasing national prosperity. Eliminate the nickel and dime! (Yes, sales-tax simplification would also be required.)



For years they've been worthless. Now they actually cost you money!

As part of my crusade, I no longer provide exact payment for utility bills or similar invoices that come to ridiculously specific amounts such as \$206.84. I round up, and pay \$207. This takes less time to write on the check, and makes me feel like a Rockefeller, since I am tipping a major corporation. Probably it forces a clerk on the other end to input that I have paid \$207 instead of \$206.84. For the labor time it takes her to enter these numbers, she will be paid a nickel.

**Actual Rocket Man In Planning Stages:** A German engineering firm called ESG has designed this [powered flying wing](#) for paratroopers. In theory a special forces paratrooper using the wing, which has tiny jet motors, could jump from a carrier aircraft and sail more than 100 miles with a combination of gliding and powered flight; smallness and shape make the flying wing invisible to radar. Of course, after a dramatic 100-mile flight abroad the stealth wing, the special forces soldier would arrive at the target – with a pistol and a signal flare, which is about all the device can carry. Don't you just sense generals are right now looking at this picture and saying, "I so don't know what this is for, but I want it."

**"You Are Sentenced to Death, Plus a Fine":** TMQ is always perplexed by criminal sentences summarized as, "Ten years in prison plus a \$500 fine." In almost all cases, the loss of freedom associated with incarceration is far more significant than any fine. Taking the cake in this category is a sentence imposed recently by a Pennsylvania court on a man named Paul Voulo, who fired a shot toward another motorist during a road-rage incident on the Pennsylvania State Turnpike. Voulo was sentence to up to four years in prison – and fined \$59.

**Reader Animadversion:** Got a complaint or a deeply held grievance? Contact me at [TMQ\\_ESPN@yahoo.com](mailto:TMQ_ESPN@yahoo.com). Include your real name and the name of your hometown, and I may quote you by name unless you instruct me otherwise.

**Next Week:** The stadium lights are switched off, the groundskeepers have gone home, the cheerleaders have put their miniskirts away in a very small drawer, the trainers rolled up the Ace bandages and the film room is dark. But TMQ saved the best for last – check next Tuesday for my annual Bad Predictions Review.

**Wednesday, February 7, 2007**

TMQ logo's nickname unveiled

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By Gregg Easterbrook

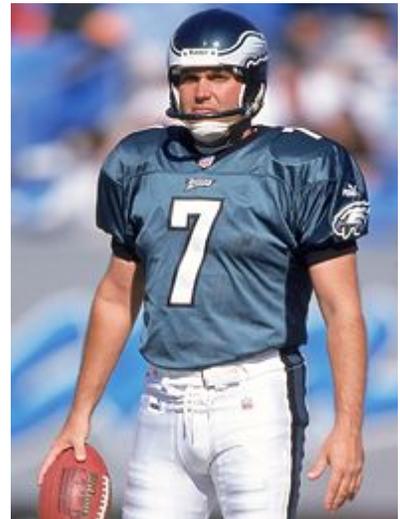
I asked readers to propose a nickname for the new TMQ logo. **Chris Repetto of Rye, N.Y.** proposed Theismann, owing to the single-bar facemask. **Laurie Myers of Philadelphia** proposed Sean for Sean Landeta, last NFL player to wear the single bar; two bars is now the minimum. **Noel Nitecki of Anderson, Ind.** suggested Tecmo, after the old video-game football character. **Chris Smith of Nashville, Tenn.** proposed Commodore, after the primitive computer the logo character is using. Keeping the primitive-PC theme, **Melissa Morgan of Santa Monica, Calif.** was among many to suggest Throwback. The winner is **Michael Merle of Glendale, Calif.**, who wrote, "I think of Schroeder from Peanuts. It looks like you put a helmet on him and replaced his piano with a computer." Schroeder -- Mr. Data, make it so!

I wrote that my opposition to the existence of the penny -- I also oppose the nickel and dime -- caused me to round all bills, paying \$104 when the bill says \$103.83. **Víctor Moreno of Querétaro, Mexico** reports that rounding is already standard in Mexico: "The electric and phone companies round down the month's bill and carry the cents to the next month. For example, if your bill is 534.33 pesos, they tell you it is 534.33, but round it down to 534 and the 33 cents go to the next bill. That way they don't lose the charge, but people don't have to deal with ridiculously small amounts of money. A peso is worth roughly an American dime."

I noted the overnamed University of Maryland University College. **Bucky Fay of Camp Phoenix, Kabul**, writes, "I not only teach for the University of Maryland University College, I teach for the University of Maryland University College-Europe. I am currently teaching classes at an Army base in Kabul, Afghanistan. Afghanistan is not in Europe, of course. Was the Geography Department eliminated so that the Department of Redundancy Studies Department could be created? UMUC-Europe and UMUC-Asia teach military personnel, their families and civilians working at bases around the world. Sadly, the home office back in the States is called UMUC-Adelphia, not the University of Maryland University College-Maryland."

I marveled that at Davidson, the Princeton of the South, they do your laundry for you. Apparently this is not as rare as I thought. Notre Dame does your laundry, reports **Jennifer Winston of Evanston, Ill.**, so long as you sew name tags onto everything. **Geoff Summers of Blacksburg, Va.** reports, "Rose-Hulman Institute of Technology not only does your laundry but has an in-house maid service to pick up your dorm room once a week. That was one of the main things that got me interested in going to Rose." **Alex Correll**, a VMI grad, reports Virginia Military Institute not only does your laundry but also dry cleaning and pressing. Finally **Steve Starbuck of Baltimore** reports that Princeton, the Davidson of the North, also will do laundry. Princeton even has a [Student Laundry Agency](#).

I mentioned booking a flight to Syracuse of New York, not ancient Greece. Many readers including **Ishmael Dengate** noted that ancient Syracuse was in Sicily. A couple years ago TMQ expressed



Now that Sean Landeta is retired from football, he can work as TMQ's logo.

horror at the notion of robot parking garages taking over the world -- since parking is the greatest long-term threat to Western civilization. **Dane Drutis** reports the [first robot parking garage in New York City](#) just opened. A column rhapsodized about Carvel's Flying Saucer ice cream novelties. **Seth Horowitz of Great Neck, N.Y.** reports the shocking news that the original Carvel in Hartsdale, N.Y. is slated to closed. Often I am suspicious of historic preservation movements -- some seem intended to pull up the ladders against newcomers. But how can the first Carvel not be an element of our cultural heritage that must be preserved?

Tuesday Morning Quarterback protests the excessively long account numbers that proliferate in modern life. Since nine digits are all that is required to assign a unique number to every person in the United States, why do we constantly encounter far longer numbers? **Jay Raman of Washington, D.C.**, "I just received an e-mail from the U.S. Postal Service telling me my order number is 901140023111715376 and my tracking number is 9101883969412130970971. Those are 18-digit numbers, meaning more than 900 quadrillion possibilities. That's a lot of orders! As a special bonus, the Postal Service also assigned me a 12-digit reference number."

**Tan H. Do of Toronto** writes, "Moore's Law states that computing power doubles every second year. To paraphrase the law, it appears the season touchdown record falls in about half the amount of time it takes to set. It took five years for Marshall Faulk to break Emmitt Smith's record set in 1995. It took Priest Holmes three years to break Marshall Faulk's record. Shaun Alexander broke Priest Holmes' record in two years. LaDainian Tomlinson broke Alexander's record one year later. Based on this trend, we should expect someone to set a new NFL season record of 32 touchdowns in the eighth or ninth game next fall."

Occasionally I fret that I will run out of obscure colleges for Obscure College Score of the Week. **Kraig Kutz of Rosemount, Minn.** reports the happy news that another obscure college is coming: "My alma mater, the College of St. Scholastica in Duluth, is poised to make its DIII debut in 2008. You can watch [the official Countdown to Kickoff](#); it's counting down to an event 576 days away. Also check the cool-looking helmet. The obvious question: How can you have a scuffed-up, battle-worn helmet when your team has never played a down?"

**Michael Precht, a United Methodist minister in Durham, N.C.** wrote, "I question your analysis of Tony Dungy's acceptance speech. You wrote "Accepting the Lombardi Trophy, Tony Dungy declared that it was a good night not only because both teams were led by African-Americans but both he and Lovie Smith are 'Christian coaches.' I understand Dungy was trying to say that both he and Smith have high standards and believe in something larger than themselves. But God does not care who wins football games!" I totally agree that God does not care who wins. But as I remember the speech, Dungy never thanked God for the victory. Rather, Dungy declared his Christian identity to be more important than his African-American identity. As proud as he was to show that black coaches can succeed, he declared himself more proud of demonstrating that one can lead a football team without violating Christian principles. Thus, Dungy is saying that a coach can be self-sacrificing, loving, and humble. As a minister, I tire of hearing athletes and coaches talk about God like a genie who gave the prayed-for victory. How about some credit when a coach makes a theological statement that is not only astute but also a challenge to volatile, abusive coaches everywhere?"

**Brian Morgan of Oceanside, New York** reminds, "Back in September you promised us a 30-year-old Gil Brandt story. I hate the Cowboys, but am sure that the story is worth hearing." In 1975, I was editor of the student newspaper at my beloved [Colorado College](#), while Brandt was running football operations for Cowboys. Back then NFL teams knew little about many players they drafted.

The elaborate scouting systems of today did not exist, while the draft was many rounds longer meaning far more players chosen.

Often, especially in the later rounds, teams selected players simply because they'd seen their names in a newspaper. The Cowboys under Brandt had a sterling reputation for finding low-round and undrafted gems. How did he do it? Brandt sent letters to the editors of college newspapers, asking if they knew of any player with a chance of making the Dallas roster. Better, he sent letters to the wives of college coaches, promising if they gave him the name of any player who had gone undrafted, and that player made the Cowboys' roster, he would thank them with a two-week paid vacation. All over the country, coaches' wives were scanning rosters for diamonds in the rough! Anyway, when I got Brandt's letter as a college editor, I wrote back suggesting a Colorado College kicker. In 2005, I called Brandt about something. He immediately said, "I remember your letter about the Colorado College kid." Gil had gotten that letter *30 years before*.

Finally, remember that although football is over, Tuesday Morning Quarterback saved the best for last -- check back next Tuesday for my season finale, my annual Bad Predictions Review.

**Monday, February 12, 2007**

**Updated: February 14, 11:42 AM ET**

Another season of bad predictions

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By Gregg Easterbrook

The season has corkscrewed to a close, and now all space aliens, mega-babes and football enthusiasts face that long, desolate offseason until two-a-days resume in July. That makes the time appropriate to point out a fact that many Americans don't believe -- there are more days in the year without football than with! Discounting college spring games and the pro preseason, contests that even the immediate relatives of players have trouble caring about, during 2007, football games will occur in the United States in 23 of the year's 52 weeks. Forty-four percent of the weeks there will be football; 56 percent of the weeks there will not be. Monday night telecasts? Counting "Monday Night Football" on ESPN and college games, 20 of the 52 weeks of 2007, or 38 percent of Mondays. Two Mondays without football for every one Monday with -- can that be legal? Figuring down to the days, I roughly estimate there will be about 90 days in 2007 when a person can either watch a football game on national television or easily attend a local high school contest. That's 25 percent of the days of 2007. Only one day in four brightened by football. Can that be legal?

The season might have ended, but Tuesday Morning Quarterback has saved the best for last: my annual Bad Predictions Review. And if you read this thinking, "Wait a minute, a month before the draft we predicted the Texans would select Mario Williams instead of Reggie Bush" -- actual prediction from the Houston Chronicle -- remember, this is my *Bad* predictions review.

Category One: Offseason Predictions

Six of the top 10 teams in last June's [ESPN.com's 2006 power rankings](#) failed to make the playoffs. Last July, "SportsCenter" had football pundits Mike Golic, Sean Salisbury and Mark Schlereth spend a week producing an elaborate complete-season forecast. Their predicted Super Bowl winner? The Carolina Panthers, who failed to make the playoffs. They forecast Indianapolis would lose in the first round of the playoffs, while the Redskins, whose actual finish was 5-11, would be the league's third-best team. Four of the group's predicted postseason entrants (Atlanta, Carolina, Pittsburgh and Washington) failed to achieve a winning record.

Over at Sports Illustrated, in June 2006 Jeffri Chadiha predicted Chicago would fail to make the playoffs. "Plaxico Burress won't be the only unhappy person in the Tri-State area, there will be plenty of Giants fans joining him because their team will be home for the postseason," Chadiha foresaw; Jersey/A made the playoffs. Nunyo Demasio of Sports Illustrated wrote that if the Chargers let Drew Brees go, "the franchise [faces] dark days." The Chargers let Brees go and finished with the best regular-season record in the league. Demasio forecast Carolina to win the Super Bowl while the Cleveland Browns would be "contenders" and "the NFL's most-improved team." Cleveland finished 4-12. Andrew Perloff of Sports Illustrated predicted Baltimore would fail to make the postseason: "The Ravens will [not be playing] in January. Take it to the bank. Take it to the M&T Bank Stadium." Baltimore finished 13-3 and opened the postseason at home at M&T Bank Stadium. Peter King of Sports Illustrated predicted Dallas would beat New England in the Super Bowl; Dallas failed to make it past the first round. King predicted Drew Bledsoe would quarterback the Cowboys' Super Bowl win, though in 2005, King had called Bledsoe "too old to be really good anymore." Meanwhile in order for New England to have appeared in the Super Bowl, it would have needed to win the AFC Championship. Yet later, in the week before the actual AFC Championship, King would predicted New England would lose.

At NBC Sports, Michael Ventre forecast a Super Bowl of New England over Carolina. Ventre dismissed the Colts as "wannabes," adding, "unless the franchise does a roster overhaul and brings in some players with muscle and mean streaks -- especially on both sides of the line of scrimmage -- they'll again have a glowing record followed by an ignominious exit." Indianapolis dominated line play on both sides in its Super Bowl win. Ventre further forecast that Atlanta, Minnesota and Tampa "are legitimate dark-horse candidates to pull a surprise." They surprised only him, all missing the playoffs.

Greg Cote of the Miami Herald forecast a Super Bowl of Panthers over Chiefs; neither recorded a playoff victory. Bill Williamson of the Denver Post predicted the Miami Dolphins would go "all the way to the Super Bowl -- and beyond," which is a spacey thought. Miami finished 6-10. Williamson further declared that New Orleans signing Drew Brees "won't work." Brees made the Pro Bowl while New Orleans reached the NFC championship. (After writing in the offseason that New Orleans signing Brees was a big mistake, in December, Williamson wrote that signing Brees was "the best pickup of the 2006 offseason.") In a piece for MSNBC, Williamson foresaw, "There will be no surprise contenders. Of the 12 teams that made the playoffs in 2005, at least 10 stand a strong chance of returning." Five of the 2005 playoff teams returned to the 2006 postseason, while the Jets and Saints surprised by changing from terrible in 2005 to playoffs in 2006.

At the Boston Globe, Ron Borges foretold that Miami picking Daunte Culpepper over Brees was "a gamble that looks like it might pay off." Culpepper was benched. At CBS Sportsline, Pete Prisco wrote that acquiring Culpepper made Miami "a legitimate Super Bowl threat." Signing Aaron Brooks, Prisco predicted, "could be a move that pays off in a big way for the Raiders." As for the Jets, "It's a two-year rebuild for this team." Of Chicago's quarterback, Prisco predicted, "Don't give up on Rex Grossman. The kid has tools." Maybe he left them in his pickup truck!

At MSNBC, Don Pierson -- whose column is titled "Ask the NFL Expert" -- forecast, "The Saints aren't very good and probably won't make the playoffs." Vince Young "won't even get to play." Young was Rookie of the Year. The Texans will be a force in 2006, Pierson foresaw, because "Gary Kubiak should be able to construct an offense a whole lot better" than the team's 30th finish of 2005. Houston finished 28th on offense. Meanwhile The Sporting News forecast that Kevin Jones of Detroit "likely will make the Pro Bowl." Jones ran for 689 yards.

Jeremy Green of Scouts Inc. predicted Dallas would win the NFC East, while Keith Kidd of the same service forecast Washington would win the same division; neither team did. Another Scouts Inc. prediction, from Gary Horton: "The biggest offseason move by the Cowboys may be the acquisition of veteran kicker Mike Vanderjagt. His accuracy could result in a couple of wins." Vanderjagt was waived after blowing two game-winning kicks.

### **Basically This Item Exists As An Excuse to Run the Swimsuit**

**Photo:** As the Miss America pageant struggles to remain relevant, I'll give you the winner from 80 years ago, [Lois Delander of Illinois](#), and the winner from two weeks ago, [Lauren Nelson of Oklahoma](#), as evidence life really is getting better. It seems puzzling that Nelson appears to be in pain, or panic, as she [receives the crown](#) -- and this is the image the Miss America organization chose to highlight. If you've ever wanted a set of Miss America golf balls, now's your [chance](#).



Iraq, the federal deficit, global warming -- but some sociological trends are clearly positive.

**Trust Us, We're Experts:** The very first Wall Street Journal edition of 2006 had as its lead story an article predicting a bad year for stocks. "Expect below-average returns again in 2006," was the banner quotation, from Jeffrey Kleintop, chief investment strategist at PNC Advisors. During 2006 the Dow Jones Index rose 16 percent. The final Wall Street Journal edition of 2006 featured a wrap-up proclaiming "a blockbuster year" for stocks. The first Wall Street Journal of 2006 also contained a table in which 33 high-profile Wall Street, hedge fund and corporate economists -- people who draw spectacular salaries for making economic forecasts -- predicted the coming 12 months. Their consensus was that 2006 would end with unemployment at 4.9 percent, the federal funds rate at 4.75 percent, the Euro at \$1.20 and the Dow Jones "somewhere between 11000 and 11999." The year ended with unemployment at 4.5 percent, the federal funds rate at 5.25 percent, the Euro at \$1.31 and the Dow Jones at 12463. Note: Considering the Wall Street Journal predicted 2006 would be a bad year for the stock market, I find it unsettling that in the first edition of this year, the same newspaper predicted 2007 will be a good year for the stock market.

### Category Two: Predictions as the Season Begins

The Wall Street Journal forecast Indianapolis as the Super Bowl winner, although defeating the Panthers, who failed to make the playoffs. The Journal added that the Redskins' roster "should be improved enough to yield a division title." Washington failed to make the playoffs.

USA Today offered six dueling Super Bowl picks as opening night approached: Colts over Panthers (predicted twice), Panthers over Colts, Colts over Falcons, Panthers over Broncos and Seahawks over Bengals. All wrong! Plus seven of USA Today's 12 predicted Super Bowl entrants failed to reach the postseason. The Associated Press predicted that Baltimore, Chicago, Jersey/B and San Diego would fail to make the postseason while the Carolina Panthers "are Super Bowl material."

Chris Mortensen of ESPN.com forecast a Super Bowl of Dallas over Cincinnati; neither won a playoff game. Mort predicted New Orleans would be the league's worst team at 2-14; the Saints reached the NFC championship. "The Bengals won't just tear it up offensively, their defense will play at a higher level," Mortensen wrote; Cincinnati finished 30th on defense.

Adam Schein of Fox Sports predicted a Super Bowl of Panthers over Bengals; neither reached the playoffs. Culpepper, Schein foresaw, "will be in the MVP mix." For the Jets, "it's a rebuilding season." Schein predicted, "The Redskins are loaded with talent on defense -- Gregg Williams' unit will once again frustrate the opposition;" the Redskins finished 31st on defense. San Diego? "I haven't seen enough to put San Diego in the playoffs." Tampa? "Jon Gruden's Buccaneers will be a big factor in the playoff race." New Orleans? "This team will fall short."

Just before opening night, Peter King switched his Super Bowl pick from Dallas over New England to Dallas over Indianapolis. He foresaw another big year for Seattle: "The Seahawks are the only NFL team that can say, with supreme confidence, 'We're going 6-0 in our division.'" Seattle finished 3-3 in its division. He prophesied of the San Francisco quarterback, "I don't see Alex Smith leading the Niners out of the wilderness, but I don't see him being the next Heath Shuler, either." He isn't! In 2006, Shuler became a congressman. King saw Miami winning its division at 10-6 because "Nick Saban made a great call on Daunte Culpepper," choosing him over Brees. Flash forward: Halfway through the season with Miami foundering, King would write, "The Dolphins long for the days before [selecting] Culpepper" because they should have signed Brees.

In its season preview issue, Sports Illustrated forecast a Super Bowl of Miami versus Carolina; neither made the playoffs. The previous year, Sports Illustrated had forecast a Super Bowl of Carolina over Indianapolis; neither made the Super Bowl. Five of Sports Illustrated's projected 12 playoff teams -- the Broncos, Dolphins, Panthers, Redskins and Steelers -- failed to make the postseason. These bad predictions pale, however, in comparison to the tea-leaf-reading of ESPN The Magazine, "Published on Earth The Planet." In 2004, ESPN Mag predicted Kansas City would win the Super Bowl; the Chiefs failed to make the playoffs. In 2005, the Mag predicted Minnesota would win the Super Bowl; the Vikings failed to make the playoffs. In 2006, ESPN Mag predicted Miami would win the Super Bowl; the Dolphins failed to make the playoffs. For three consecutive years, ESPN Mag's predicted Super Bowl winner has not even qualified for the postseason. After the Dolphins opened 1-3, the Mag declared "there is no need to panic" in Miami. Dear Miami: You should have panicked!

Then there was the incredible [ESPN.com meta-forecast](#). Twelve fulltime pro football pundits predicted the Super Bowl outcome. Their forecasts: Colts over Panthers (predicted six times), Panthers over Colts, Colts over Seahawks, Seahawks over Colts, Panthers over Patriots, Seahawks over Broncos, and Bengals over Cowboys. Twelve tries, all wrong! No ESPN expert forecast the Bears to make the Super Bowl, while 10 of ESPN.com's 24 projected Super Bowl entrants failed to make the playoffs. Also from the meta-forecast: Michael Smith had Michael Vick as MVP, Mike Golic had Bill Parcells as Coach of the Year and Merrill Hoge had Nick Saban as Coach of the Year.

**College Bonus:** CBS Sportsline predicted Ohio State would meet West Virginia in the BCS title game. West Virginia failed to make a BCS bowl.

**Bad Quarterback Draft Predictions:** Jay Cutler "could move ahead of Vince Young or perhaps even Matt Leinart," Clifton Brown of the New York Times wrote before the draft. The actual order was Young, Leinart, Cutler. "Matt Leinart may go second in the draft, he may go third, but he's not going to slip," Mel Kiper Jr. of ESPN declared before the draft. Leinart slipped to ninth. "Marcus Vick is going to be picked a lot higher than you think -- maybe as high as late third round," Matt Hayes of The Sporting News wrote shortly before the draft. Vick was not chosen in any round. (Marcus Vick "will be a star for the Miami Dolphins at wide receiver," Paul Zimmerman of Sports Illustrated added on September 1. The following day, Miami waived Vick. Although he was later re-signed by Miami, he caught zero passes on the season.) Clemson quarterback Charlie Whitehurst "could be this year's Charlie Frye," the Denver Post's Bill Williamson wrote before the draft. Perhaps that was an honor Whitehurst did not seek! Predictions to remember: On draft day, Hoge said Brody Croyle will be a better quarterback than Vince Young. Croyle is currently third string at Kansas City. On draft day, Ron Jaworski of ESPN said Kellen Clemens will be a better quarterback than Young, Leinart or Cutler. Clemens is currently the backup at Jersey/B. "In five years we will talk about Clemens the way we talk about Tom Brady," Jaworski predicted.

**This Is Football; It's Baseball Where You Cover All Bases:** Reader Randall Good of Gettysburg, Pa., notes that before the Cowboys at Eagles game, Cris Carter predicted in writing on Yahoo's sports site that Philadelphia would win. In a video clip on the same site, Carter predicted Dallas would win.

**Retroactive Bad Prediction!** In June 1986, Newsweek ran its infamous "Marriage Crunch" cover story, which pronounced that a college-educated career woman of age 30 had only a one-in-five chance of winning a husband, while an educated professional woman of age 40 had essentially no chance. At a time when this must have sounded funny to someone at Newsweek, the magazine declared that a single 40-year-old career woman was "more likely to be killed by a terrorist" than to find a man who would say "I do." Twenty years later in June 2006, Jeffrey Zaslow of the Wall Street Journal checked to see how these predictions stood the test of time. Women aged 30 to 40 in 1986 when Newsweek declared them unmarriageable are aged 50 to 60 now, Zaslow reasoned. Crunching Census Bureau stats, he found that 90 percent of college-educated American women between the ages of 50 to 60 have married at least once. Zaslow tracked down the 10 career-shark single women who were named in the 1986 Newsweek cover story as certain spinsters: eight later married. Zaslow was engaged in an informal "longitudinal" study, which in sociology means following what happens to people over an extended period. The mother of such studies is NLS-72 -- the [National Longitudinal Study of the High School Class of 1972](#), which follows the lives of high school graduates from 1972.

#### Category Three: Midseason Predictions

Half the season is in the books, and patterns are emerging. What do the pundits predict now? "I'm reasonably sold on the Eagles" to win the Super Bowl, Michael Silver of Sports Illustrated wrote, while the main midseason Sports Illustrated article predicted a Super Bowl of Colts over Giants. "The Broncos' defense is great, better than Baltimore's hyped unit. And yes, the Denver defense is good enough to win a Super Bowl," Bill Williamson proffered in the Denver Post.

At the midseason mark, USA Today ran six more Super Bowl predictions: Colts over Falcons, Bears over Chargers, Patriots over Giants, Patriots over Bears and Colts over Bears -- the latter from Jeff Zillgitt. Sean Salisbury of ESPN also predicted, at midseason, Colts over Bears. These exceptions are essential to proving the rule: There are so many NFL predictions, somebody's got to be right.

Pete Prisco of CBS Sportsline foresaw that the injury to Donovan McNabb "will just about do it for the Eagles' playoff chances." When Mike Shanahan benched Jake Plummer for Jay Cutler, John Clayton of ESPN said Shanahan "has pulled off another brilliant move. By going down the stretch with rookie quarterback Jay Cutler ... the Broncos appear set to enter the AFC playoffs." Denver went 2-3 under Cutler and missed the playoffs. Steve Silverman of MSNBC wrote at midseason that Tony Romo was the next Tom Brady while "the pieces are in place" for Cowboys to make Super Bowl. The pieces were what was left on the floor after the Cowboys' collapse.

Worst midseason prediction, from Jeffri Chadiha of Sports Illustrated: "The Indianapolis Colts will be exposed. They probably won't make a strong playoff run. They aren't going to win the Super Bowl."

**Snyder to Hire Jeff George to Run New Restaurant Division:** Last week Red Zone Capital, the investment firm of Chainsaw Dan Snyder, acquired [Johnny Rockets](#), the 1950s nostalgia-burger chain. Here are some of the sweeping changes Chainsaw Dan plans:

- Fry cooks, busboys to be fired weekly.
- Successful menu items such as cheeseburgers to be dropped; Snyder personally will choose recipe

for new seaweed burger.

- Instead of singing "That'll Be the Day" and "It's My Party," waiters and waitresses will sing "In A Gadda Da Vida."
- New corporate P.R. strategy will focus on denouncing media and suing anyone who mentions Johnny Rockets in print.
- Heinz ketchup to be replaced with Washington Redskins branded tomato-like product.

**Life Imitates Art:** [Last month](#) Tuesday Morning Quarterback made sport of television announcers who cry "it was almost intercepted!" when a defender barely touches the ball. First Indianapolis snap of the Super Bowl, Peyton Manning threw over the middle and Brian Urlacher, leaping as high as he could, barely grazed the pass with his fingertips, knocking it off course. Jim Nantz of CBS: "It was almost intercepted!"

**Retroactive Bad Predictions:** "There's no question gas will hit \$4 a gallon" in 2006. Ben Brockwell, director of pricing at the Oil Price Information Service, in 2005.

**Super Bowl Commercials:** This year's were so lame there is hardly even anything to mock, except the FedEx commercial, which showed cubicle workers of the future floating weightless in an office on the Moon. You're not weightless on the Moon! Coffee falls to the surface with a splash just like on Earth.

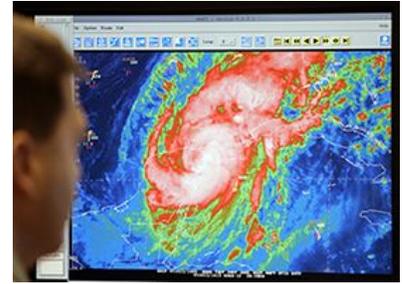
**Bad Hurricane Predictions:** The year of Katrina and Rita, 2005, obviously was awful for Atlantic cyclones, with a record 15 hurricanes. Both the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration, and media-favorite hurricane forecaster William Gray of Colorado State University, predicted 2006 would be bad, too. In December 2005, Gray predicted for 2006 nine hurricanes, five of them intense; there was an 81 percent chance a major hurricane would strike land in the United States in 2006, Gray and CSU said with ridiculous pseudo-precision. In May 2006, NOAA forecast eight to 10 hurricanes, six of them intense. The 2006 hurricane season would be "hyperactive," NOAA declared: "The main uncertainty is not whether the season will be above normal but how much above normal it will be." Actual: In 2006 there were five Atlantic hurricanes, two of them intense -- pretty much smack on the 20th century average for the Atlantic basin. None made landfall in the United States.

What's amusing is not so much how far off the predictions were but how the forecasters tried to weasel out of their projections. Late in August, after most of the summer already had passed with calm seas, NOAA switched to forecasting only seven to nine hurricanes. Gray and CSU switched to forecasting seven hurricanes, three of them intense. That is -- now that we know there haven't been a huge number of hurricanes, we are predicting there won't be a huge number of hurricanes! In August, CSU lowered its prediction of a major landfalling hurricane from the ridiculous pseudo-precise 81 percent to an equally ridiculous pseudo-precise 73 percent.



We're surprised the announcers didn't say "It was almost intercepted!" on this play.

In September, Gray and Colorado State changed predictions a second time, "forecasting" five hurricanes. That is, once it was nearly certain 2006 would end as an average year for hurricanes, the hurricane experts predicted an average year. Unable to resist its utterly meaningless pseudo-precise forecasts -- issued, perhaps, to impress science-illiterate journalists -- Colorado State said in September there remained a 59 percent chance a hurricane will affect the U.S. coast that month, plus a 14 percent chance a hurricane would strike the United States in October. Needless to say, none struck in either month. Note to the experts at Colorado State -- when you multiply a bunch of estimates, do not treat the product as precise.



I see nine ... no wait, seven  
... no wait, I see five  
hurricanes coming!

Gray and CSU might as well have claimed there was a 59.263452096489244 percent chance of a landfalling hurricane. hilariously, the Associated Press story about the September backtrack by Gray and Colorado State declared, "Previously, Gray had predicted seven hurricanes." Wait a minute, at first Gray predicted nine hurricanes. Then *after he knew* there would not be a lot of hurricanes in 2006, he started claiming he had predicted seven. After the hurricane season was nearly over, he started claiming he predicted only five. When media hurricane concern ramps up around Memorial Day, bet you anything Gray tells gullible reporters, "I was the one who predicted there would be five hurricanes in 2006."

#### Category Four: Bad TMQ Predictions

"Don't assume this is a lost season for Jersey/B," I wrote in August, when sports pundits were forecasting an awful year for the Jets. I listed four reasons Eric "I Was a Teenaged Coach" Mangini's charges would reach the playoffs in his first year. So am I am seer? Three weeks later when I predicted season records, I forecast Jersey/B at 4-12.

This year 11 of my 32 forecast season records proved exactly right or within one game plus or minus; 18 were off; three were *way* off. Last year I hit 11 of 32 exact or within one, too. Both these performances are disappointments compared to 2003, when TMQ predicted 18 of 32 season records either exactly or within one. Then I foolishly thought I might know what I'm doing; increasingly, 2003 appears to be a fluke. Last season I compared my 11-of-32 performance to Paul Zimmerman of Sports Illustrated, and found he also went 11-of-32. This season I compared my 11 of 32 to Don Banks of Sports Illustrated, and found he went 9 of 32 in predicting team records either exactly or within one.

My generic predictions took a beating. My annual Super Bowl generic prediction -- "the team goin' to Disney World will come from among the group that did not make the cut for 'Monday Night Football'" -- honked out in the wild-card round when Kansas City, the sole non-MNF baby to qualify for the postseason, lost. My off-price ultra-generic prediction, Home Team Wins, was kicked in the teeth, finishing only 141-125, a paltry 53 percent correct. The advanced generic formula advocated by Professor Eric Isaacson of Indiana University -- Best Record Wins; If Records Equal, Home Team Wins -- had an off year too, finishing 150-117, or 56 percent. Isaacson's formula did beat the weakest predictor on the ESPN board, Chris Mortensen, whose forecasts went just 146-121. My generic final score prediction -- Home Team 20, Visiting Team 17 -- fared OK, happening five times during the 2006 season. To my knowledge none of the sports pundits, touts or books who attempt to predict exact final scores actually called more than one score correct in 2006. So next year just endlessly forecast Home Team 20, Visiting Team 17. You don't even need to know who's playing!

If you're silly enough to predict exact final scores, for goodness sake don't foretell rare scores or outliers. Amazingly common in NFL final score forecasts are the outcomes 11, 12, 15 and 18 -- scores that rarely occur. Reader Bob Fitzgibbon of Walpole, Mass., notes three game outcomes that occurred six times in 2006 -- 20-17 (five with the home team winning, once for visitor), 23-20 and 24-21. Three outcomes occurred four times -- 24-10, 27-24 and 17-13. If you're going to engage in a quixotic attempt to predict exact final scores, use these number pairs. If you predict a game will end with a 11, 12, 15 or 18 in the scoring pair, or with any score below 10 or above 27, you're not following the percentages.

**Avoid Best Bets:** The "wisdom of crowds" theory also took a beating this season. Last year, the consensus of Yahoo! users finished ahead of all Yahoo! sports experts. This year the consensus of users pulled up third. If you wanted a reasonable guide, unanimous picks by ESPN experts went 80-37 on the season -- in the future, predict only games that all ESPN experts are in agreement on. Though that's no guarantee either. As noted by reader Bryan Beske of Madison, Wis., before Week 9, the tout box on ESPN.com's NFL page proclaimed, "Our experts don't agree very often, so when they unanimously select five games on the Week 9 schedule, consider those picks as good as Ws." Three of the five ESPN [unanimous projections](#) turned out wrong. The NFL sportswriters at USA Today finished 80-22 on their "lock of the week." That is, when they were certain something would happen, they were right 78 percent of the time. The year's worst forecasting performance: the staff of Pro Football Weekly went 31-34-2 on "best bets." Their *best* predictions finished behind flipping a coin!

**Trust Me, I'm Running the Economy:** Alan Greenspan, Federal Reserve chairman at the time, said in 2004: "A severe price distortion in housing seems most unlikely." Greenspan said in 2005: "We don't perceive there is a national housing price bubble." In 2006, housing prices had their sharpest decline in 38 years.

**Bronze Olympic Predictions:** Economics professor Daniel Johnson of TMQ's beloved alma mater, [Colorado College](#), devised an incredibly scientifically advanced computer formula using per capita income, population, "past performance and political systems" to forecast the medals outcome at the Turin Olympic Games. Colorado College announced that the formula, which it called "remarkably accurate," predicted the medals finish order would be Germany, Russia, Norway, United States. Actual: Germany, United States, Canada, Austria.

**Predictions From Beyond the Stars:** "The pick for this year's come-from-the-dumps team is the Arizona Cardinals. ... There might be a playoff game in that new stadium next January." -- Pete Prisco, CBS Sportsline. Clark Judge of the same organization predicted both Arizona and Detroit would make the playoffs. (Judge's justification: "Hey, five of Detroit's losses in 2005 were by no more than six points." In 2005, 45 percent of all NFL games were decided by no more than six points.) Jeremy Green of Scouts Inc. forecast, "The Cardinals have the potential to be the most explosive offense in the NFL." Arizona finished 18th on offense. Michael Smith of ESPN.com had the Lions winning their division and Rod Marinelli as Coach of the Year. Don Banks of Sports Illustrated: "There's a nine- or 10-win season out there waiting to be had for Oakland. You heard it here first." That's the only place you heard it! Adam Schein of Fox Sports predicted the Lions would win "eight or nine games;" Peter King predicted Detroit would be the "surprise team" of 2006, winning its division at 10-6. Detroit was last in its division at 3-13. (King: "Jon Kitna will make few of the glaring errors Joey Harrington made." Actual: Kitna threw 10 more interceptions than thrown by Harrington in 2005.) King further predicted David Boston would be the "surprise guy" of the season for the Buccaneers. A few days later Boston was waived.

**Bad Iraq Predictions:** "I predict Iraq won't have a civil war, that it will have a viable constitution, and that a majority of Iraqis and Americans will, in two years time, agree the war was worth it." -- Jonah Goldberg in the National Review Online in 2005. The media watchdog group [FAIR](#) points out that Thomas Friedman of the New York Times, a prominent advocate of the United States invasion of Iraq, since 2003 has predicted on at least nine occasions that the Iraq situation would be resolved in less than a year. "I think that we're going to know after six to nine months whether this project [the Iraq war] has any chance of succeeding," Friedman told Oprah Winfrey in January 2006. "The next six to nine months are going to tell whether we can produce a decent outcome in Iraq," Friedman said on the "Today Show" in March 2006. So Iraq is must be resolved now, right? Friedman in late November 2006: It will be "either 10 months or 10 years" before the Iraq situation is settled. And why has the United States involvement in Iraq gone so badly? Friedman in November 2006: "Iraq was already pretty broken before we got there -- broken, it seems, by 1,000 years of Arab-Muslim authoritarianism, three brutal decades of Sunni Baathist rule and a crippling decade of United Nations sanctions. It was held together only by Saddam's iron fist. Had we properly occupied the country and begun political therapy, it is possible an American iron fist could have held Iraq together long enough to put it on a new course." So how come Friedman didn't tell us this *before* thousands died?

**Nick Saban Predictions:** Mark Maske of the Washington Post: "Nick Saban has the look of being a big-time NFL coach, and it won't be long before he has the Dolphins in Super Bowl contention." Bill Williamson of the Denver Post: "Nick Saban is building something special in Miami." ESPN's John Clayton: "Nick Saban ... will catch or pass the Patriots" in 2006. The Associated Press: Miami will win the AFC East because "Players have bought into Nick Saban's system." Peter King on NBC's "Football Night in America" on December 31, 2006: "Nick Saban does not want to go anywhere. Saban is not going to leave the Miami Dolphins. Saban is not going to go to Alabama. Saban is not going anywhere." Three days later Saban took the Alabama job. Nick Saban: "I'm not going to be the Alabama coach."

**Subset -- "Could" Predictions:** The qualifier "could" runs through many bad predictions. Practically anything "could" happen. Jennifer Lopez "could" go out to dinner with me; Congress "could" set aside partisan bickering in the name of the national interest. Gil Brandt, NFL.com: Houston "is a team that could surprise people [and] make the playoffs." Clark Judge, CBS Sportsline: Drew Henson "has shown signs of becoming the quarterback who could figure into the future of the Cowboys." Henson was waived in training camp. Andrew Perloff of Sports Illustrated: Craig Nall "could follow Matt Hasselbeck's lead and go from being Brett Favre's backup to the Pro Bowl." Nall was third string all season for the Bills and did not appear in a game. Bonus: Megabucks consulting firm Booz Allen Hamilton predicted bird flu "could" cause the entire Internet to [shut down](#).

**Subset -- Weirdly Specific Predictions:** Pete Prisco, CBS Sportsline: "Ben Watson caught 29 passes in 2005 and he will at least double that this season." Watson caught 49 passes. Jason Whitlock, Kansas City Star: Larry Johnson will run for 110 yards in the Chiefs' final regular season game. He ran for 138 yards. Michael Wilbon, the Washington Post: The Bears can win the Super Bowl if Devin Hester's kickoff returns reach "near midfield twice." Peter King, Sports Illustrated, of his predicted Super Bowl: Terrell Owens will have six receptions. Not five, not seven -- six.

**Subset -- Sean Salisbury Predictions:** In October on "SportsCenter," Salisbury forecast a Super Bowl of Indianapolis over Chicago. So he's a seer? Then when the playoffs began, Salisbury predicted a Super Bowl of San Diego against New Orleans. Sean -- be true to your school! Then the

week before the Super Bowl, Salisbury predicted that if Devin Hester returned a kick for a touchdown, the Bears would beat the Colts.

**Rugby Gods to Wax Wroth Against Russell Crowe:** Last week TMQ noted that the Chicago Bears fired their Honey Bears cheerleaders in 1986 for being "too sexy," and the football gods, outraged, have not allowed Chicago to win a Super Bowl since. Reader Scott Yonts of Winston-Salem, N.C., reports that actor Russell Crowe, part owner of the South Sydney Rabbitohs rugby team, [just fired the cheerleaders](#) for being too sexy. "A team of percussionists will replace the cheerleaders, the club announced," the Associated Press reported. One wonders how many Australians, exactly, are going to say, "Hey mate, let's go out to the football pitch and have a look at the drum corps." Will Russell Crowe be replacing babes with percussionists in his own personal lifestyle? Check out the [Rabbitohs Cheerleaders](#) while you still can. And if the Bears are any guide, the Rabbitohs aren't going to be winning the Rugby League crown anytime soon.

**Wacky Martini Watch:** Chicago has a booming nightclub scene, and is also becoming the world capital of strange cocktails. Reader Chris Hanson of Oak Park, Ill., nominates this wacky martini from a trendy Chicago night spot: the bartender "infuses Skyy vodka with pomegranate, peppercorns and thyme; adds some red-wine syrup; and squeezes in the juice of a lime." Not shaken or stirred, infused!

**Wacky Food Predictions:** The Washington Post predicted that "one-bite food" would be the food fad of 2006; instead the 2006 fad was the 1,230-calorie [Triple Whopper](#). (Think Johnny Rockets is a fresher alternative? A Rockets Double, chocolate shake and regular fries contain a stunning 2,823 calories and 162 grams of fat -- a full day's recommended calorie maximum plus nearly three times the daily recommended fat intake.) At the December 2005 Future of Food Conference, advertising guru Faith Popcorn predicted 2006 would see the widespread marketing of "faith-friendly food," including "Christian-raised chicken." Wait -- chickens raised by Christians, or as Christians? And why did Popcorn's 1991 prediction of a fad for "cocooning" make her a corporate-world celebrity? "Cocooning" only means "people stay home at night." That is, Popcorn predicted people will continue to do what almost everyone has almost always done.



Dan Snyder just acquired Johnny Rockets last week, and already the restaurant chain is way over budget.

**Soon Illegal Canadian Pennies Will Be Sneaking Across the Border:** Last week Tuesday Morning Quarterback declared that not only are pennies an anachronism, so are nickels and dimes. Reader Meredith Carrell of Taos, N.M., reports that since pennies and nickels now cost more to produce than they are worth, the United States mint has [banned the melting of pennies and nickels](#) while "prohibiting the unlicensed exportation of these coins, except that travelers may take up to \$5 in these coins out of the country." Please, travelers, take the coins out the country -- we want to get rid of them! The new regulation is backed by the threat of a \$10,000 fine for melting pennies. Considering that a penny now contains 1.4 cents worth of copper, the fine would be \$14,000 if paid in pennies.

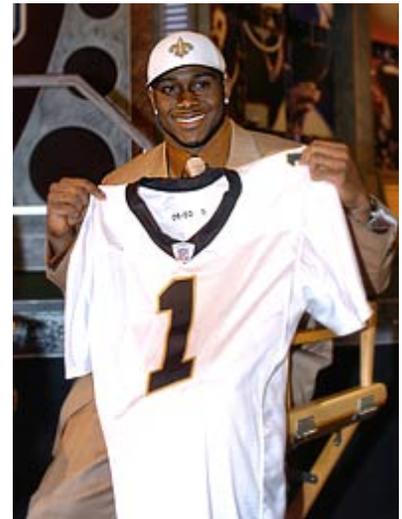
**Serious Predictions:** September 2005: David Nabbaro, a World Health Organization official, says a bird flu pandemic might kill 150 million people worldwide. February 2006: Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases at the National Institute of

Health, says, "It's almost certain that within a reasonable period of time we will experience an influenza pandemic." March 2006: Michael Leavitt, secretary of Health and Human Services, advises Americans to stockpile six weeks' worth of food, water and medicine in their homes in case the United States economy collapses during a bird flu pandemic. April 2006: the WHO formally warns of up to 7.4 million global deaths. May 2006: ABC airs a made-for-TV movie that depicts half the United States population dying nearly overnight from bird flu. May 2006: The White House [avian flu response plan](#) warns of 2 million Americans dead and says the president should be prepared to send the United States Army into cities to put down bird flu riots. [Total actual deaths worldwide](#) from avian influenza since the disease was identified in 2003: 166.

Of course 166 deaths represents 166 tragedies. But more than 4 million people have died in traffic accidents worldwide during the same period in which 166 perished from bird flu -- statistically, traffic deaths look exactly like a pandemic, yet no government or media organization seems particularly concerned about road safety. And of course the determined response of the global public-health community has helped stave bird flu off. (The reasons a mass outbreak of avian influenza seems unlikely are summarized [here](#), in article I wrote for Slate.) During the same period that governments and the media have pressed the panic button over a small number of bird flu deaths, 1.5 million people worldwide have [died from rotavirus](#), which unlike bird flu is actually spreading and killing in significant numbers. Rotavirus is confined to the poor nations of the developing world, so no one in the West cares. There is a vaccine for rotavirus, but it costs \$200 per course -- prohibitive for poor nations. White House, how about an emergency plan to stop rotavirus? Television networks, instead of sci-fi silliness on bird flu, how about some coverage of the world's actual disease emergency?

**Bad New Orleans Saints Predictions:** "No one should make the mistake of assuming the Saints are ready to compete for a playoff spot." -- Don Banks of Sports Illustrated, July 2006. In January, the same Banks predicted the Saints would win the NFC title game. None of ESPN.com's 12 preseason forecasts had New Orleans making the playoffs.

**Where Will Reggie Play?** "The Texans will select USC running back Reggie Bush with the No. 1 pick in this April's NFL draft, team and league sources told Chris Mortensen," ESPN.com declared in January 2006. The next day, Mortensen added that "no matter what anyone says," Houston was "certain" to draft Bush. "Reggie Bush will be the first pick in the draft," Mel Kiper Jr. said on ESPN radio in January 2006. "Reggie Bush is going number one, it's just a question of to who," Kiper reiterated on ESPN television in March. "I just don't see [Houston] passing on USC running back Reggie Bush," Kiper said two days before draft. On Friday night before the noon Saturday start of the draft, the Texans used their first choice on Mario Williams. At 10 a.m. Saturday as ESPN draft coverage began, host Suzy Kolber asked an ESPN panel who was surprised by the Texans taking Williams instead of Bush. All the panelists said they were surprised -- except for Mortensen, who declared that he had never expected Bush to be chosen first. Kolber asked about the reports Bush would go first, and Mortensen answered with a sneer, "Those projections were made by the media." Mort -- you are the media! Mortensen declared he had known since Thursday that the Texans were choosing Williams. Oh, so you knew all along: you just forgot to say so!



Page 2 knew all along Reggie Bush wouldn't be the first player chosen. We just forgot to say so.

**What Will Reggie Weigh?** At the Indianapolis Combine, Reggie Bush weighed in at 201 pounds, but told the media he "expects to be at 205 pounds" by the USC Pro Day in April. The next week Peter King wrote, "I expect Bush will weigh about 208 pounds" at USC Pro Day. "About" 208 pounds -- so my prediction may be off by a few ounces! LenDale White was 238 pounds at the Combine, and predicted he would be 233 pounds on Pro Day. Actual weigh-ins from USC Pro Day: Bush 201 pounds, White 244 pounds.

#### Category Five: Playoff Predictions

Now it gets interesting: What did the experts say once the playoff field was known? On the eve of the wild-card round, USA Today ran its third set of dueling Super Bowl predictions: Chargers over Saints (predicted twice), Ravens over Eagles (predicted twice), Chargers over Bears and Colts over Bears. So once again USA Today did have a correct prediction -- but by a different guy! At midseason, Jeff Zillgitt said Colts over Bears. Once the playoffs started he switched to predicting Chargers over Saints, while Jarrett Bell switched to predicting Colts over Bears. Considering USA Today's triple-predictions format, each of its six NFL writers got three shots at a Super Bowl prediction; the paper finished 2 of 18.

On CBS television, Dan Marino predicted a Super Bowl of San Diego versus New Orleans, Shannon Sharpe predicted New Orleans versus Baltimore. On ESPN television, Chris Berman predicted New England versus Seattle. All wrong!

Ron Borges of the Boston Globe forecast a Super Bowl of New Orleans over San Diego -- though earlier he had predicted New Orleans would finish last in its division. Aaron Schatz used the incredibly scientifically advanced database of Footballoutsiders.com to forecast Baltimore as the Super Bowl favorite; then after the Ravens lost, forecast New England as the winner.

Coming into championship week, Sports Illustrated's main prediction was a Patriots-Bears Super Bowl, while the consensus of Sports Illustrated NFL writers predicted a Colts-Saints Super Bowl. That about covered the bases! Of ESPN's forecasters, [all eight said New Orleans would defeat Chicago](#) to reach the Super Bowl. This despite the Bears being a 14-3 team playing host to an 11-6 club in the Saints. Sean Salisbury, who at midseason had predicted the Bears would make the Super Bowl, and Joe Theismann, who at midseason called the Bears "the class of the NFC," both predicted Chicago would lose the NFC championship at home to a team with an inferior record. Only the ESPN computer, Accuscore -- which simply endlessly predicts that the team with the best statistics will win -- correctly called the NFC championship. Though before you go trusting computers, Accuscore liked New England over Indianapolis.

**Dewey Beats Truman!** "The upcoming election of 2006 is not likely to be all that close -- the left is going to lose big." Prediction from conservative commentator Michael Novak in June 2006, five months before the left won big in the 2006 elections. In September 2006, two months prior to the vote, Republican Rep. John Boehner of Ohio, then House majority leader, said, "I can see us losing a seat or two, but I don't see us losing our majority." The Republicans lost their majority and 30 seats. One week before the election, White House political advisor Karl Rove, said, "I'm looking at all of these races, adding them up, and I add up to a Republican Senate and Republican House." Both the Senate and House turned Democratic.

**New Frontiers in Bad Predictions:** In August 2006, Paul Zimmerman of Sports Illustrated wrote that him picking Indianapolis to win the Super Bowl "won't happen in the near future." In January 2007, Zimmerman picked Indianapolis to win the Super Bowl. That is -- Zimmerman made a bad prediction about his own predictions! Zimmerman's forecast that Indianapolis would win the Super Bowl came one week after predicting Indianapolis would lose the AFC championship. Zimmerman

also predicted Chicago would lose the NFC championship, writing, "One thing I don't like about the Bears is their special teams." Bears' special teams to that point had scored six touchdowns! Meanwhile Dennis Dillon of The Sporting News wrote of Denver's decision to switch to Jay Cutler, "This move could lead to the Broncos making a deep run into the playoffs, but it also could blow up in their faces." Denver missed the postseason on a field goal in overtime, meaning the Cutler decision neither caused a deep run nor blew up. TMQ admires this Bad Prediction for its sheer audacity -- seemingly so vague as to predict the full range of possibilities, it still managed to be wrong!

#### Category Six: Bad Super Bowl Predictions

The day after Chicago and Indianapolis won the Super Bowl invites, Mike Florio of Profootballtalk.com predicted the Colts would take the Lombardi Trophy by 10 points. The night before the game, Florio switched sides and said Chicago would win. Mike -- be true to your school! Florio: "The Bears have constructed a game plan that will focus on chewing up the clock via the efforts of running backs Thomas Jones and Cedric Benson." Chicago coaches called 31 passing plays and 17 rushing plays.

ESPN.com offered no fewer than 21 dueling Super Bowl [exact final score projections](#) and all, of course, were wrong, though NFL editor Peter Lawrence-Riddell barely missed at Colts 28, Bears 17.

Then there was the incredible celebrity Super Bowl ring-up conducted by David Nielsen of Scripps Howard News Service. Annually for 18 years, Scripps Howard has phoned a surfeit of celebrities before the big game and asked their predictions. A sampling of this year's answers: Dwyane Wade predicted Bears, 28-24. Charlie Sheen said Colts, 37-33. Mickey Rooney said Bears, 24-14. Jennie Finch said Colts, 34-27. Bob Cousy said Colts by the odd score of 37-12. Dionne Warwick said Colts, 31-28. Actor Jim Caviezel said Colts, 31-20. (Caviezel played Jesus in "The Passion of the Christ" and -- I am not making this up -- has said that to method-act sorrow on the cross, he thought about the Minnesota Vikings' Super Bowl losses.) Alfred Rascon, a retired Army major who won the Medal of Honor, said Bears, 21-14. Actor John Amos said Bears, 24-17. Needless to say you have guessed that of the dozens of celebrities called by Nielsen, none predicted the exact final score.

Six years ago, Tuesday Morning Quarterback used incredibly [scientifically advanced analysis](#) to estimate that someone forecasting only probable outcomes -- that is, avoiding 11, 12, 15 and 18 plus all low and high totals -- had a roughly one-in-500 chance of predicting an exact NFL final score. Scripps Howard News Service has now polled a total of 1,541 celebrities over nearly two decades. Only tennis player Martina Navratilova (1998) and tough-guy actor Dennis Farina (2005) have predicted the exact final Super Bowl score. Two of 1,541 correct -- just about my forecast range. Thus, Tuesday Morning Quarterback predicted the ability of people to predict!

Which Scripps Howard prediction came closest? Astronaut Buzz Aldrin, swimmer Michael Phelps and magicians Penn & Teller just missed at Colts, 28-17. TMQ was intrigued by two near-misses. CIA Director Michael Hayden came close at Colts, 24-17. If only the CIA's intelligence about Iraq had been as good as its intelligence about the Super Bowl! Playboy model Kendra Wilkinson came close at Colts, 27-13. Last year, one of the closest Super Bowl predictions was offered by Playboy model Andrea Lowell, who forecast Pittsburgh over Seattle by 21-17. Obviously all future exact final score predictions should be made by Playboy models! I will speak to ESPN management about incorporating this into the column.

The Envelope Please ...

**Worst Prediction of the Year, Fourth Runner-Up:** Dan Pompei, The Sporting News. At the halfway mark of the season, Pompei wrote that the Bears will "fade" while the Dolphins have "a strong finish." Jake Plummer, Pompei added, "is a better quarterback than he has shown, expect him to prove it in the second half of the season."

**Worst Prediction of the Year, Third Runner-Up:** Tuesday Morning Quarterback, spoken on the ESPNNews show Hotlist. "Dallas is going to stick with Drew Bledsoe. Bill Parcells has been around long enough to know not to change horses in midstream of a playoff push."

**Worst Prediction of the Year, Second Runner Up:** Terry Bradshaw, Fox Sports. "The Eagles cannot make the playoffs." Predicted two weeks before the Eagles made the playoffs.

**Worst Prediction of the Year, First Runner-Up:** Mike Florio of Profootballtalk.com: "We predict for both the Bears and the Colts a tough time in 2006."

**Worst Prediction of the Year:** Bob Oates, Los Angeles Times. Oates predicted Cincinnati, Denver, Detroit, Miami, Pittsburgh and Washington would reach the postseason -- all missed -- while Chicago would not make the playoffs. He said the Lions had a realistic chance of advancing to the Super Bowl. And the Indianapolis Colts? They will "flame out" because Peyton Manning "isn't a natural quarterback."

**Reader Animadversion:** This feature folds its tent and steals off into the desert until two-a-days resume.

**Next Week:** Tuesday Morning Quarterback folds its tent and steals off into the sunset, though will reappear briefly around the NFL draft. As always, I advise you use the offseason to engage in spiritual growth, reconnect with family and friends, perform volunteer work in the community, install energy-conservation devices, exercise daily, attend worship services of any faith, and read some of those great books you've always meant to read. Of new or upcoming books, I recommend "Blocking the Courthouse Door" by Stephanie Mencimer (nonfiction), "American Gospel" by Jon Meacham (biography), "Half of a Yellow Sun" by Chimamanda Adichie (fiction), "The Trouble with Physics" by Lee Smolin (science), "The Origin of Wealth" by Eric Beinhocker (economics), "Five Days in Philadelphia" by Charles Peters (history) and "Presidential Humor" by Liz Carpenter (humor). Read, exercise, mediate, serve others -- then you will feel justified in racing back to the couch, the remote, the microbrews and the swimsuit calendars when the football artificial universe resumes in the fall.



Can Hugh Hefner's current girlfriend predict how long she will hold that distinction?

**Monday, February 26, 2007**

**Updated: February 27, 12:37 PM ET**

2010: The mock draft

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By Gregg Easterbrook

BRISTOL, Conn., Feb. 27, 2010 -- Today ESPN is delighted to announce its new telepathic infusion feature, available to users of Microsoft's new Windows Subspace operating system. Just click on the icon that shows high-voltage electricity entering a human brain, and the entire contents of today's Page 2 will be beamed directly into your neocortex. It's fast, it's easy, and the advertising will be over before you know it! (Note: You must first click "I accept" to the disclaimer. Please do not read the disclaimer before agreeing.) To celebrate the arrival of 2010 technology, Tuesday Morning Quarterback forecasts the 2010 draft, to be held in New York in two months. An asterisk indicates junior-eligible.

**1. LOS ANGELES BIMBOS: Tim Tebow, QB, Florida**

A quarterback is a natural first choice for a new expansion franchise, and Bimbos coach Urban Myer won't be able to resist tabbing his own Florida star. The Bimbos' unusual ownership structure -- the new franchise is jointly owned by Creative Artists Agency, Paramount, Nike and venture capital firm Kleiner Perkins Caufield Byers -- means the funds should be available for Tebow's projected \$1.28 billion signing bonus.

**2. DETROIT LIONS: Arrelious Benn\*, WR, Illinois**

Following the Lions' third consecutive 0-16 campaign, fans continue to call for the ouster of Matt Millen. Detroit is now 24-120 under Millen's leadership. Despite a nearly empty Ford Field this season, the Ford family (which owns the Lions) just signed Millen to another long-term contract extension. "We -- must -- have -- Matt -- Millen," William Ford said with a blank expression on his face at the news conference, as Millen was observed manipulating the dials of a strange device. The new deal also gives Millen total control over car marketing decisions for Ford Motors. Millen has announced that all high-selling Ford models such as the Edge will be discontinued, and the company will roll out a new line of oversized SUVs called the Godzilla.

**3. SAN DIEGO CHARGERS: Tray Allen\*, OT, Texas**

Choice interrupted by the announcement that XM Radio, Sirius, DirecTV and JetBlue just merged to form a cutting-edge "stationary entertainment" company. The new enterprise, to be called Goin' Nowhere Airlines, will offer "so many hi-tech video and audio options that hours will pass before passengers notice their plane is idling on a taxiway," a spokesperson said.

**4. INDIANAPOLIS COLTS: Jermaine Cunningham, DE, Florida**

It's been a painful downhill slide for the Colts since their Super Bowl XLI win, though the recent signing of free-agent quarterback Rex Grossman has created some optimism for next season.

**5. OAKLAND RAIDERS: Markeith Summers, WR, Mississippi**

After firing coach Lane Kiffin three games into the 2007 season, then firing replacement Wayne Fontes, then firing replacement Tom Flores, then firing replacement Rich Kotite, Al Davis was praised widely for naming Debbie Messinger of Great Neck, Long Island, N.Y. as the first female coach in the NFL. "Sure she's 15 years old and has never seen a football game," Davis said of his new coach. "But she has a lot of fine qualities. For one, she was willing to take the job."

**6. TORONTO BILLS: Joe McKnight\*, RB, USC**

The Department of Homeland Security continues to investigate how three moving vans carrying Bills' equipment and office furniture were able to cross the Lewiston-Queenston Bridge between New York and Ontario at 3 a.m. without being stopped for inspection. ([Here is the disclaimer](#) for those seeking employment on New York-Canada border bridges.)

**7. TAMPA BAY BUCCANEERS: Jai Eugene, CB, LSU**

Controversy continues over the recent disclosure that for the last 13 years, Tiki Barber has played cornerback for the Bucs while Ronde Barber was a running back for the Giants and is now a co-host for "The Today Show." Ronde declared at a news conference yesterday, "They never suspected a thing." At least the Associated Press believes it was Ronde who said this.

**8. ATLANTA FALCONS: Gerald McCoy, DT, Oklahoma**

Playing Michael Vick at middle linebacker was going surprisingly well, until the injury to quarterback Vinny Testaverde forced Vick back under center and the same old problems started all over again for coach Jim Mora Sr.

**9. NEW ENGLAND PATRIOTS: A.J. Haase, TE, Yale**

After Bill Belichick appeared on the sidelines in painter's overalls and flip-flops for the Patriots' most recent playoff contest, NFL commissioner Condoleezza Rice threatened to fine the team unless its coach exhibits "at a minimum, the personal grooming standards of a chimney sweep."

**10. DALLAS COWBOYS: Marvin Austin\*, DT, North Carolina**

The 'Boys posted a respectable showing in 2009 considering they were coached by Kyle Chandler, the actor who played coach Eric Taylor on the old "Friday Night Lights" television show. At first it seemed unnerving that Dallas owner Jerry Jones referred to his new employee as "Coach Taylor," rather than as Kyle Chandler. But gradually this caught on, and now the Cowboys' players actually believe the man running the team won the Texas 5A state championship with the Dillon Panthers.

**11. DENVER BRONCOS: Myron Rolle, S, Florida State**

The Colorado economy has been booming since it was discovered that Coors Light can be converted into ethanol.

**12. MIAMI DOLPHINS: Lee Chambers\*, RB, Miami**

The South Beach trendy set finally has gotten over the January 2007 defection of Nick Saban, now the head coach of the University of Saskatchewan.

**13. WASHINGTON REDSKINS: Sergio Kindle, LB, Texas**

Daniel Snyder has been a little distracted since being named Secretary of State by President Jenna Bush. At least after a few months on the job he stopped referring to the Cowboys, Eagles and Giants as the "axis of evil."

**14. TENNESSEE TITANS: Ryon Williams\*, WR, Florida State**

After leading Briscoe High to a last-second victory in the Nike commercial, Williams had a solid career for the Seminoles.

**15. BALTIMORE RAVENS: Josh Oglesby\*, OT, Wisconsin**

The Ravens have not scored a touchdown in three seasons, and you really have to wonder how long their defense can keep this club competitive.

**16. GREEN BAY PACKERS: Carl Johnson, OT, Florida**

Speaking to reporters last week, Brett Favre said he had not yet decided about retirement.

**17. JERSEY/B JETS: Tony Jerod\*, DT, Texas A&M**

The once-youthful Eric Mangini has aged so much in four years of running the Jets he's now appearing in AARP commercials.

**18. PITTSBURGH STEELERS: Akeem Hebron, LB, Georgia**

Team officials expect Ben Roethlisberger to make a full recovery from the broken ribs, torn ligaments, root canals, pneumonia, dengue fever, brain surgery, lung transplant, skydiving accident, scuba-diving bends, whooping cough, bird flu and lumbago he suffered during the offseason.

**19. KANSAS CITY CHIEFS: Mitch Mustain, QB, Arkansas**

NFL owners refused to approve the Chiefs' proposed relocation from Missouri to Kansas.

**20. PHILADELPHIA EAGLES: Justin Boren, C, Michigan**

Some family-values groups have objected to the team's use of porn starlets as cheerleaders.

**21. CAROLINA PANTHERS: Ricky Sapp, DE, Clemson**

The Panthers are worried about their pass rush now that Julius Peppers has retired and opened an [Orange Julius stand](#).

**22. CINCINNATI BENGALS: Micah Johnson, LB, Kentucky**

This year all Cincinnati draftees immediately will be placed under house arrest. As the Bengals' first choice walks up to the podium in New York, corrections officers will secure an electronic bracelet to his ankle.

**23. JERSEY/A GIANTS: Jason Street, QB, Notre Dame**

The "Friday Night Lights" lead character, who recovered in the 2007 season finale episode, went on to attend Notre Dame as planned and now will star for the Giants. Though it was a bit petty of Eli Manning to steal his girlfriend, Lyla.

**24. NEW ORLEANS SAINTS: Aaron Hernandez\*, TE, Florida**

The team continues to recover from Hurricanes Ana, Bill, Claudette, Danny, Erika, Fred, Grace, Henri, Ida, Joaquin, Kate, Larry, Mindy, Nicholas, Odette, Peter, Rose, Sam, Teresa, Victor and Wanda, all of which struck New Orleans last year. (Note: These are the actual names the National Hurricane Center has [reserved for 2009 tropical storms](#). Names reserved for later years include Hurricane Virginie, to be pronounced vir-JIN-ee, and Hurricane Igor.)

**25. SEATTLE SEAHAWKS: James Gregory, LB, Franklin & Marshall**

The Seahawks' all-blue theme continues as the team has mandated that its players paint their faces blue for games, causing TMZ to rename this franchise the Seattle Picts.

**26. JACKSONVILLE JAGUARS: DeMarco Murray, RB, Oklahoma**

People laughed when Britney Spears bulked up to 345 pounds and joined the Jags as a nose tackle. They're not laughing now.

**27. CHICAGO BEARS: Thaddeus Gibson, LB, Ohio State**

Lovie Smith's policy of firing an assistant coach whenever the defense allows a touchdown has led to a pretty lean staff.

**28. ST. LOUIS RAMS: Apaiata Tuihalamaka\*, DE, Arizona**

Marshall Faulk's un-retirement was a hit with fans, but the Merlin Olsen comeback did not go as well.

**29. CLEVELAND PINKS: Steve Weedon, LB, West Virginia**

Traditionalists continue to be outraged that the Browns' name was altered as part of the league's attempt to broaden its appeal to women.

**30. SAN FRANCISCO 49ERS: Eric Berry\*, CB, Tennessee**

Plans to share a new stadium with the Raiders went awry when Al Davis made a last-minute demand that the Niners pay for joint laundry services for the two teams.

**31. MINNESOTA VIKINGS: Vidal Hazelton, WR, USC**

Patrons can shop while watching Vikings games at the team's new stadium in the Mall of America.

**32. HOUSTON TEXANS: Luke Schmidt, FB, Notre Dame**

Picking low for the first time in franchise history, the AFC champion Texans continue to celebrate the MVP award won by Mario Williams -- who proved them right to select him first in 2006 ahead of two now-forgotten players.

**33. ARIZONA CARDINALS: A.J. Wallace, CB, Penn State**

Marty Schottenheimer finally won it all.

**Monday, April 23, 2007**

**Updated: April 30, 12:23 PM ET**

TMQ's 2007 mocking of mock drafts

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By Gregg Easterbrook

"With the 248th pick in the 2007 NFL draft, St. Louis selects ..."

You'll need to steel yourself to survive this coming weekend. You'll need draft guides, a laptop, microbrews and a mute button at the ready. Lots of fresh air is recommended. And you'd better be in it for the long haul. Any wimp can watch the first round on Saturday. True draftniks are still squinting at the crawl at the bottom of ESPN on Sunday afternoon as the bell rings, a linebacker from Texas Methodist University is picked, Sal Paolantonio interviews a quality-control coach and the camera shows a team's draft room in which tired-looking guys shuffle stacks of paper or stare off into space.

You'll also be barraged with draft clichés this week. Here is what some of them really mean:

"We were surprised he was still there." Translation: "We're worried about choosing a guy everyone else passed on." Maybe there's a reason he was still there!

"A lot of teams called about our pick, but we decided to keep it." Translation: "No one called about our pick."

"Our doctors aren't concerned about that injury." Translation: "Why the hell didn't we know he was injured?"

"The Wonderlic test is just one of many factors we consider." Translation: "None of our coaches can answer those questions, either." (Question: Judy's brother is three times as old as Michelle's younger sister, who is traveling 60 miles per hour east along the hypotenuse of a triangle. In five years, what will Dick Cheney's Social Security number be?)

"We take the best available athlete." No one ever says, "We steer clear of the best athletes." Yet year in and year out, this appears to be the draft strategy of several NFL teams.

"We are not influenced by workout numbers at the combine." That must be why most of the league's teams sent most of their coaching staffs to Indianapolis.

"We're very concerned with character issues." Translation: "We'll overlook practically anything, but we know the commissioner wants us to say we're concerned about character."

"We draft for performance, not potential." OK, then why will Dave Ball of New Hampshire, who broke Jerry Rice's Division I-AA touchdown record, be lucky to hear his name called?

"We always draft for special teams." Translation: "We never draft for special teams." Though one-third of field position is determined by kicking downs, most NFL clubs rarely choose players for special-teams ability.

"We really like our draft." Translation: "Boy, what a great job I did." No April NFL cliché bothers TMQ more than, "We really like our draft." First, what is a coach or general manager supposed to say? They aren't going to say, "We just blew our picks on a bunch of no-account who-dats who are headed straight to the waiver wire." In the hours after the draft, team officials would be foolish not to declare that they liked their draft class; saying this is part of sales promotion, to get customers excited about next autumn. (Most NFL ticket sales occur during the offseason.) And when a coach

or general manager says, "We really like our draft," what he's doing is evaluating himself. He's the one who made the picks -- so of course he'll assign himself a high grade!

"That's about where I expected him to be chosen." Sure to be said by Mel Kiper Jr., and translates as, "In my mock drafts I also had him going a lot higher and a lot lower."

"That's exactly where I expected him to be picked." Sure to be said many times this weekend by multiple draft pundits, and translates as, "Actually, I never heard of this guy until a few seconds ago."

"Huh? Did they just pick somebody?" Sure to be said many times this weekend by Tuesday Morning Quarterback, and translates as, "Huh? Did they just pick somebody?"

In other draft news, as usual for this time of year, everyone's debating who the first few choices should be and in what order. Bear in mind that the exact draft order does not signify which players are best -- nobody knows that. Suppose JaMarcus Russell goes first to Oakland. This won't tell us he's the best player, or even that he's better than Brady Quinn; it will only tell us Oakland management is guessing Russell is the guy most likely to improve the team's chances. Joe Thomas may go before Adrian Peterson; this wouldn't tell us Thomas is better than Peterson, just that a club is guessing he is more likely to improve its chances. Guesswork is a core theme. Of course, if you knew Russell would be the next John Elway, you'd take him in a flash regardless of whether you needed a quarterback. Of course, if you knew Gaines Adams was the next Bruce Smith, you'd take him in a flash regardless of whether you needed a defensive end. But nobody knows such things. Keep the guesswork element in mind as the "experts" speak in the coming days, as if the NFL draft were a science based on tenths of a second in the shuttle run. Remember, many NFL personnel managers thought the Colts made a big mistake by choosing Peyton Manning instead of Ryan Leaf.

And in other draft news, everyone has a mock draft -- but only Tuesday Morning Quarterback *mocks* the draft! My annual Mocking Mock Draft follows. And everyone forecasts the first round -- but only Tuesday Morning Quarterback proceeds directly to forecasting the last round. See below for my annual seventh-round forecast. Forget who will go first in the NFL draft. Who's going to go last?

## 2007 MOCK OF MOCK DRAFTS

### **1. Oakland Raiders: Essence Carson, captain, Rutgers women's basketball**

No figures in the sports world will get more public support and enthusiasm next season than the Rutgers women -- maybe they are the ones who can make the Raiders popular again! In the second round, Oakland hopes to tab Sam Zell, billionaire buyer of distressed properties. Crumbling office buildings, the Chicago Cubs ... these pale in comparison to the turnaround challenge with the Oakland Raiders.

### **2. Detroit Lions: Calvin Johnson, wide receiver, Georgia Tech**

If Matt Millen uses a lottery pick on a wide receiver for the fourth time in five years, he will need just seven more drafts to realize his dream of having the first NFL team to start an offense composed entirely of wide receivers chosen in the first round. Note: Detroit has stockpiled four fifth-round picks. *Finally* Millen's brilliant long-term strategy is revealed.

### **3. Cleveland Browns: Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer**

With the Indians' home opener snowed out in April, the Browns are worried their Sept. 9 opener against the Steelers will be snowed out, too. Rudolph could use his nose to signal-in plays. And during the offseason, Rudolph can work as a replacement for the notorious Chief Wahoo.

**4. City of Tampa Buccaneers: Katherine Harris, defeated Florida senatorial candidate**

If Harris had been in charge of scoring NFL games last year, the Bucs would have won the Super Bowl!

**5. Arizona Cardinals: Sanjaya Malakar, oddity**

Exactly the sort of prospect the Cards traditionally seek high in the draft. In the epic Sanskrit poem Mahabharata, Sanjaya is a character whose name means "victory." Evidently the "American Idol" judges don't read a lot of epic Sanskrit poetry.

**6. Washington Redskins: Nancy Pelosi, Speaker of the House**

George W. Bush calls Redskins owner Dan Snyder and pleads with him to draft Pelosi, "then line her up as the Z receiver and send her over the middle."

**7. Minnesota Vikings: Randy Moss, Marshall University**

The Vikings hope to start all over by drafting not the current Randy Moss, but the Randy Moss of 1998. Classified Pentagon technology is involved.

**8. Houston Texans: Vince Young, quarterback, University of Texas**

"Honest, Commissioner, that's what we wrote on our card last year. Honest. Can't we just hand in the card this year?"

**9. Miami Dolphins: Lou Saban, retired coach**

The Dolphins will tab Nick's older cousin, bring him to town, publicly promise him the head coaching job -- then tell him they've changed their minds.

**10. Atlanta Falcons: Bobby Douglass, quarterback, University of Kansas**

Teaming Douglass with Michael Vick could produce the greatest running back tandem in NFL history.

**11. San Francisco 49ers: Al Gore, Oscar winner**

Having Gore speak at halftime would reduce greenhouse gas emissions -- because fans would not drive to the stadium to attend games. If you're taking your sweetheart on a date, take her to "An Inconvenient Truth," because she'll cuddle up to you during the scary parts. Note: In a little-reported development, Gore used confusing butterfly ballots to rig the Academy Awards vote. The winner in his category should have been [this Oscar finalist](#), a documentary about Pentecostalism produced by Rachel Grady and Heidi Ewing. It's well worth your time to watch. Ewing and Grady are the hottest documentary team working right now -- their 2005 "The Boys of Baraka," [about four Baltimore inner-city kids attending a boarding school in Kenya](#), is also a must-see.

**12. Buffalo Bills: Zak DeOssie, linebacker, Brown**

Harvard's Marv Levy will pick this Ivy League star for Yale's Dick Jauron.

**13. (Projected trade) Pittsburgh Steelers: Robert Jarvik, inventor, artificial heart**

The Steelers plan to have a physician line up in the backfield with Ben Roethlisberger. (Projected trade: Steelers send their first, third and seventh picks in 2007, plus their second selection in 2008, fifth pick in 2009, third and sixth picks in 2010, seventh pick in 2011, seventh pick in 2012, fourth and fifth picks in 2013, third pick in 2014, third pick in 2015 and an option to exchange seventh-round choices in 2009 to the Rams for St. Louis' first and fourth selections in 2007, third pick in 2008, fourth pick in 2009, third and fifth picks in 2010, fifth pick in 2011, sixth pick in 2012, second pick in 2013, fifth pick in 2014 and third pick in 2015. Also, the teams agree to a Secret Santa exchange.)

**14. Carolina Panthers: Moezeldin Elmostafa, Durham, N.C. cab driver**

Elmostafa is the witness who knew that one of the Duke lacrosse players couldn't possibly have

done what he was accused of doing, and [stuck to his story](#) despite police attempts to intimidate him into silence. And while everyone is rightly bashing the sleazeball district attorney, what about the Durham police department? The Durham police in this case come off looking highly suspect, yet no officers or commanders have been fired.

**15. St. Louis Rams: Adria, sinister super-advanced space alien**

Since the Rams won the Super Bowl led by a space alien taking the form of "Kurt Warner," it's all been downhill for the St. Louis franchise. Now that the "Stargate SG-1" television franchise is going off the air, maybe the Rams could sign Stargate's mightiest alien?

**16. Green Bay Packers: Andrew von Eschenbach, director, Food and Drug Administration**

Thousands of spectators attend Packers games with cheese on their heads. How can we be sure this cheese is safe and wholesome? Does it even meet the legal definition of cheese? [See here for the definitions](#), including such appetizing categories as cheese that is "surface-ripened principally by mold." Note: The FDA director follows the modern affectation of the unneeded middle initial, [calling himself Andrew C. von Eschenbach](#). Oh, so you mean *that* Andrew von Eschenbach.

**17. Jacksonville Jaguars: Dave Batista, professional wrestler and former bouncer**

The Jags covered nearly 10,000 seats at Jacksonville Municipal Stadium -- you can't buy tickets to those seats even if you want to -- in order to increase the frequency of sellouts, and thereby make attending a Jacksonville game seem more desirable. Isn't the next logical step placing bouncers by the stadium gates and refusing to let some patrons in?

**18. Cincinnati Bengals: Daniel Bogden, Paul Charlton, Margaret Chiara, H.E. Cummins III, David Iglesias, Carol Lam, John McKay and Kevin Ryan**

Maybe the eight federal prosecutors fired by the Justice Department for refusing political orders can clean up the Bengals' multiple problems with the law.

**19. Tennessee Titans: Tôru Iwatani, lecturer, Tokyo Polytechnic University**

Iwatani designed the original Pac-Man, which debuted in Japan in 1980. He called his creation Puck-Man. Midway, an arcade-game manufacturer which brought the rights, renamed the product Pacman on the assumption that the P would get changed to an F within hours if not minutes of a Puck-Man machine being installed in an American arcade.

**20. Jersey/A Giants: Scarlett Johansson, mega-babe**

World's most beautiful woman was born in Manhattan and should be an irresistible local-pride choice for the Giants -- if only they were a New York team.

**21. Denver Broncos: Jim Brown, Len Ford, Frank Gatski, Otto Graham, Lou Groza, Gene Hickerson, Leroy Kelly, Dante Lavelli, Mike McCormack, Marion Motley, Ozzie Newsome, Paul Warfield and Bill Willis**

Former Cleveland Browns not already on the Broncos' roster.

**22. Dallas Cowboys: James Arness, U.S. marshal, Dodge City**

Wade Phillips has a great Texas name and is a good coach, but he's too mild-mannered for the Cowboys' job, which requires a tough guy.

**23. Kansas City Chiefs: Denzel Washington, head coach, T.C. Williams Titans**

Herm Edwards barely seemed to be paying attention, let alone showing any emotion, as Kansas City was dismantled by Indianapolis in the postseason. Denzel Washington was a lot more psyched up about an imaginary high school game than Edwards was about an actual NFL playoff game! Note: if you stare at the [Chiefs' red logos](#) long enough, will you see green?

**24. New England Patriots: Katharine Jefferts Schori, presiding bishop, Episcopal Church**

She's getting nowhere healing the rift between the Episcopalians and their parent Anglican Communion. Maybe she can heal the rift between the Patriots and the Jets. Note: [Schori is an instrument-rated pilot](#), her daughter is a United States Air Force officer and her husband is a retired topologist.

**25. Jersey/B Jets: Phoebe Cates, mega-babe**

World's most beautiful brainy woman was born in Manhattan and should be an irresistible local-pride choice for the Jets -- if only they were a New York team.

**26. Philadelphia Eagles: Jeremy Bloom, male model**

Last April the Eagles used a midround choice on Bloom, though he had not played football in three years. Now that he hasn't played in four years, he must be even more valuable!

**27. New Orleans Saints: Poseidon, god of the sea**

New Orleans needs to stay on Poseidon's good side. Poseidon was also god of horses, which should bring the Saints luck in their opener against the Colts.

**28. New England Patriots: Vera Wang, couturière**

Bill Belichick must stop wearing ripped-sleeve hoodies on the sidelines. Maybe if Wang designed a smashing selection of ball gowns and cocktail dresses for him...

**29. Baltimore Ravens: Ryan Kalil, center, USC**

Possible actual pick thrown in for variety.

**30. San Diego Chargers: Amar Bose, inventor of the waveguide speaker**

The Chargers will install gigantic loudspeakers on their sidelines and on fourth down scream at their defenders, "Fourth down -- knock it down!"

**31. Chicago Bears: Joe Bastardi, Expert Senior Forecaster, Accuweather**

Bastardi, who sells private weather forecasts to corporate clients -- only in America! -- claims to possess "[astonishing ability to grasp the potential impact of severe weather patterns](#)." Using his astonishing ability, he could have told the Bears to run the ball in the rain at the Super Bowl! Note: Expert Senior Forecaster is his actual title.

**32. Indianapolis Colts: Danny Manning, assistant coach, University of Kansas men's basketball**

As a precaution, Bill Polian hopes to lock up rights to athletes named Manning.

**Hoping to Close the Deal, Austin City Fathers Also Offered NBC a Fruit Basket:** The city of Austin, Texas, where "Friday Night Lights" is filmed, has offered to pay NBC \$40,000 if the network renews the series. This is reminiscent of the Austin Powers scene in which Dr. Evil threatens to destroy the world unless he receives \$1 million. "Friday Night Lights" is among the most expensive shows in television history -- those authentic-looking public gatherings and outdoor crowd scenes are costly to film. Consider the brief scene where Tyra's mom confronts Buddy Garrity as he leaves church. This was effective cinematography because it visually communicated the double standard of Buddy endlessly talking sanctimony while cheating on his wife. The church-confrontation scene must have caused NBC accountants to groan, because it was an outdoor shoot that meant renting a church, hiring lots of extras as congregation, dressing them in Sunday-finest costumes and so on. Some accountant must have said, "Couldn't she just call him on the phone?" Producing "Friday Night Lights" costs at least \$40,000 *per minute* of air time. So the city of Austin's proposal is that if NBC films another 1,000 minutes of FNL, about the number for the first season, Austin will pay for one of those minutes.

TMQ really likes "Friday Night Lights." Many episodes did, however, veer dangerously toward chick-flick. Longing glances, nonstop relationship talk -- an announcer might as well say, WE INTERRUPT THIS PROGRAM FOR A FOOTBALL SCENE. In the final few episodes of what everyone hopes was Season One, the show focused on the marriage of Eric and Tami Taylor. The surprise twist in television terms was that they have an affirmative relationship -- few television dramas depict marriage as an honorable estate, let alone show husband and wife as best friends and happily monogamous. But we got so much about the strong marriage of SuperCoach and SuperWife that when the Panthers won the state championship in the final reel, there was no time for anything on how this impacted the high school kids or the town of Dillon. "Friday Night Lights" producers got so distracted by the Taylors' domestic state of affairs that the Panthers forgot to play enough games! Dillon ended its [imaginary championship season](#) at 11-2, and you must appear in 16 games to reach the Texas state finals.

Too much click flick, not enough football was complicated by football being depicted unrealistically -- especially in game situations. Seven of Dillon's 11 victories came on long touchdowns on the game's final play, which is ridiculous. Every time a game ended with a million-to-one final-play touchdown, my 12-year-old, Spenser, proclaimed, "Oh come on." To win the state championship, the Panthers went the length of the field as the clock expired: a team might do that once a generation, but no team has ever done it seven times in a season and no team ever will. FNL's repeated use of preposterous game endings was like those "Star Trek" episodes where hope seems totally lost until at the last minute the captain presses a bunch of buttons really fast and then everything's fine. Yes, Hollywood wants overdone moments and emotional manipulation -- "Remember the Titans" ended with a ridiculous length-of-the-field winning touchdown on the final play -- but one of the selling points of "Friday Night Lights" is that it's not just more Hollywood schlock. Please FNL producers, if the football gods grant you another run, depict football games realistically, not as sci-fi.

Anyway, "Friday Night Lights" is a fabulous show and really deserves a second year. Here's my cheer for NBC executives:

Sway to the left, sway to the right,  
Renew another season for "Friday Night Lights"!

**Actual Texas High School Football:** Back in the actual Texas, here is [the 16-game season of Southlake Carroll](#), current 5A champion. Note that in 2006, Southlake Carroll played four games at Texas Stadium, home of the Dallas Cowboys, one game on Texas Tech's field and one at the Alamodome. A high school team! Also note that 16-0 Southlake Carroll, winner of three consecutive Texas championships, played only two close contests in 2006. Fourteen of the Dragons' 16 victories were walkovers, most decided by the second quarter. Can it be strictly by chance a preponderance of the really good football players in Texas were for three straight years born in the Southlake Carroll school district? As high school football has gone big-time, several states have begun to exhibit what is in effect prep recruiting. Families of boys with football promise move into the districts of the best teams, sometimes of their own accord, sometimes with coaches' encouragement and the aid of boosters, though all states ban the latter practices. The result is a few teams like Southlake Carroll record blowout win after blowout win after blowout win -- and what is sportsmanlike or even interesting about blowout wins? Many recent Texas high school playoff games have been low-quality contests owing to the blowout factor. Texas, California, Washington state and several others need to have a look in the mirror about the epidemic of district-hopping by high school football players, before the integrity of the sport is diminished.

**In Praise of David Carr:** TMQ's immutable Law of Quarterback Talent holds: All quarterbacks suddenly become more talented when the pass blocking is good. Matt Schaub seemed promising in Atlanta, where the blocking was good and a premium running attack kept pressure off the quarterback. Now he goes to the Texans, and we'll see how he looks while being sacked 249 times a game. Actually, that's the total number of sacks endured by David Carr as a Texan, but if you have ever had the misfortune of watching the Moo Cows, it felt like whoever was behind center got hit 249 times per game.

Let's inject a little realism on the Texans' wily quarterback moves. In the 2006 draft, Houston passed on Vince Young, who's from Houston. Now Houston gives up two second-round draft choices -- the equivalent of a first-round pick -- for Schaub, a backup with a grand total of two career starts. A decade ago, Buffalo gave Jacksonville a No. 1 choice for backup quarterback Rob Johnson, and perhaps you remember how that turned out. Schaub's career passer rating is lower than Carr's, while their career YPA and touchdown-interception ratios are essentially the same. That is to say, Schaub has performed somewhat less well than Carr, despite playing in a dramatically better offense. What does Schaub bring to the Texans? The sense that he hasn't played enough to be viewed as a disappointment. Houston management considers this worth the equivalent of a No. 1 draft choice, while considering David Carr worth nothing at all, since the Texans waived him.

TMQ has always admired Carr, who for five years toiled without grievance for a poorly run, losing franchise. The Texans under Carr had a succession of who-dats at left tackle, plus no-accounts at other offensive line positions; never fielded a blue-chip running back; and if you can name a Houston tight end, you are a better man than I am, Gunga Din. Yet Carr performed reasonably well and *never complained*. As the first overall choice in the NFL draft, Carr might have sounded off. Eli Manning, Carson Palmer, Michael Vick -- several recent first-overall quarterbacks -- have thrown public temper tantrums. Thrust into a bad situation, Carr was a consummate gentleman and the exemplar of the team player. For that he was shown the door. Here's my first 2007 prediction: Carolina will be very happy to have landed the classy David Carr.

Law of Quarterback Talent note: JaMarcus Russell totally outperformed Brady Quinn in their bowl meeting, leading conventional wisdom instantly to transfer the expected No. 1 crown from Quinn to Russell. Maybe Russell will be the better pro; I have no idea. (And, bear in mind, neither does anyone else.) But during the Sugar Bowl, I was counting "one-thousand one, one-thousand two, one-thousand three, one-thousand four" as Russell stood upright like a statute and calmly scanned the field for receivers. When Notre Dame snapped the ball, Quinn rarely had two seconds before he was hit or forced to scramble. All quarterbacks suddenly become more talented when the pass blocking is good! The LSU offensive line provided great pass blocking in the Sugar Bowl, while Quinn spent much of his final two collegiate contests, against USC and LSU, scrambling to his right. Suppose Russell finds himself at Oakland behind a gawd-awful line that last year surrendered 72 sacks, while Quinn lands with a team with good pass protection. Sports pundits may profess amazement that Quinn has suddenly become more talented while Russell has suddenly lost his talent!

Classy quarterback note: Drew Bledsoe leaves with an admirable expression of perspective. His parting statement: "I feel so fortunate, so honored, to have played this game that I love for so long, with so many great players, and in front of so many wonderful fans. I fulfilled a childhood dream the first time I stepped on an NFL field, and the league did not let me down one time. I retire with a smile on my face, in good health, and ready to spend autumns at my kids' games instead of my own." This is the same guy who, when traded away from the Patriots, bought a full-page ad in the Boston Globe to thank New England spectators for cheering for him. Far too many successful men

and women in all walks of life spend their time nursing trivial grudges, rather than expressing gratitude as Bledsoe did. This isn't just a point of civility. Psychological research shows that people who feel and express gratitude live longer, have fewer heart attacks and strokes, and score well on other measures of well-being. So Bledsoe's only a long shot for the Hall of Fame -- so what? He leaves with his head held high, his priorities in order and generously thanking others, rather than complaining. There goes one classy guy.

**"The S&P Rose, and NFL Draft Futures Were Off a Fraction":** Everyone's been puzzling over the Denver-Tampa trade, in which the Bucs get the rights to Jake Plummer, who says he has retired. The Broncos receive a seventh-round choice if Plummer really retired, but a fourth-round pick if he plays for anyone in 2007; if Plummer really is done, Tampa receives his contractual obligation to return at least \$3 million in forfeited bonuses, money originally paid by Denver but now owed to Tampa, which holds Plummer's paperwork. Sports pundits have offered two interpretations of this trade. The first is that Oakland wanted Plummer but Denver refused to do business with the Raiders, so used the Bucs as an intermediary, essentially offering a commission. (If Tampa trades Plummer for more than a fourth-round choice, the Bucs profit.) The second interpretation is that Denver was trying to unload the headache of collecting the money Plummer must return if he indeed retired. But why would Tampa *want* that headache? OK, the Bucs are owned by the Glazers, who in business matters can be, let's say, whimsical. At any rate, Tuesday Morning Quarterback sees a perfectly straightforward explanation for the transaction: Denver was willing to pay \$3 million for a seventh-round draft choice.

For years, the NBA and NHL have engaged in outright sales of draft choices. Last June, Phoenix simply sold the 27th pick in the NBA draft to Portland for cash. But while swapping picks for cash is respectable in other sports -- TMQ has proposed that the [Chicago Board of Options Exchange](#) establish a market in draft-choice futures -- traditionally the NFL frowns on selling draft positions. If Plummer really retires, Denver will have broken the taboo, surrendering a right to reclaim at least \$3 million (the total might be higher) in exchange for a seventh-round choice. That sets the market quite high: if a seventh-round NFL draft pick is worth \$3 million, what would higher choices sell for on the open market? Last year the Suns got \$3 million from the Trailblazers for their first-rounder. Economically, the Plummer deal suggests that a seventh-round choice in the NFL draft is worth as much as a late first-round pick in the NBA. Considering the disparity between NBA and NFL revenue, and the relative value of victories in the 16-game pro football season versus the 82-game pro basketball season, these prices may not be far out of whack.

Meanwhile another NBA practice -- exchanging salary-cap space -- is creeping into the NFL. Trading for Adam Archuleta, Chicago assumed about \$4.5 million in guarantees owed to him by the Redskins. Essentially, that means the Bears traded cap-strapped Washington \$4.5 million in accounting space. How long until there is a salary-cap futures market?

**Responding to Charges That His Book Borrows From Others, Sen. Kerry Said, "Ask Not What Your Publisher Can Do for You...":** In 1995, yours truly published a book on environmental policy called "A Moment on the Earth." Sen. John Kerry and his wife Teresa Heinz Kerry have just published a book on environmental policy called "This Moment on Earth." OK, titles cannot be copyrighted; anyone is free to sell a book called "Gone With the Wind." (The 2001 legal controversy regarding the book "The Wind Done Gone" concerned not the title but similarities of plot and characters; under some circumstances, plot and characters can be copyrighted.) Seriously, can Sen. Kerry claim never to have heard of my book "A Moment on the Earth"? It was, after all, a New York Times and American Library Association "Notable Book of the Year" *in the same topic he's writing about*. Anyway, let's assume this was an honest mistake by a United States

senator and a rich woman whose names are often attached to material they have barely glanced at. Here are other works of literature being written by John Kerry and Teresa Heinz Kerry:

"The Reasonably Good Gatsby"

"For Whom the Bell Rings"

"To Kill a Magpie"

"Much Ado About Relatively Little"

"The Bridge Over the River Kennebec"

"The DiMaggio Code"

"War and Pizza"

"Moby-Dave"

Also, John and Teresa will record a jazz track titled "Take Six" and a rock-and-roll song titled, "(I Can't Get Nothing) Satisfactory."

**How Soon They Forget:** Which team blew the fourth overall selection of 2002? Which blew the fifth pick of 1996? Which blew the sixth overall choice of 2003? Which blew the third overall selection of 1998? You don't recall, but you do remember who expended the second overall choice of 1998 on Ryan Leaf. This kind of thing is doubly delicious because the team that blew the third pick of 1998 -- Arizona, on Andre Wadsworth -- originally held the second choice, but traded it in the Leaf deal. All football enthusiasts clearly recall the colossal error San Diego made with the second choice of 1998; and the man responsible for that decision, Bobby Beathard, never worked in football again. Hardly anyone remembers how Arizona botched the next choice; and the man responsible for that decision, Bob Ferguson, kept his job with the Cards for another five years, then was hired by the Seattle Seahawks. If you're going to blow a draft choice, don't blow the first or second choices, which people remember -- blow any pick from the third on down.

**NFL Hypocrisy Watch:** "We must protect the integrity of the NFL," NFL commissioner Roger Goodell said in announcing the suspension of Adam Jones and Chris Henry. He continued, "It is important that the NFL be represented consistently by outstanding people as well as great football players. We hold ourselves to higher standards of responsible conduct." So why is O.J. Simpson still a member of the NFL's Hall of Fame?

**Free Agency Isn't Free:** For all the hoopla over this winter's free-agent signings, consider: How many big-bucks free agents started in the Super Bowl? Two, Muhsin Muhammad and John Tait of Chicago. Adam Vinatieri of the Colts and Ruben Brown of the Bears also came through free agency, though not for big bucks. Indianapolis and Chicago fielded mainly homegrown performers who were acquired via the draft or as little-known young players. In the winter of 2006, Edgerrin James and Steve Hutchinson received the biggest free-agent bonuses and the most free-agency hype; their new teams were eliminated by Thanksgiving. It is not impossible for a big-bucks free agent to become an important piece in a successful NFL club's puzzle, but it is rare. Unlike basketball or baseball, where a star can win a game with an individual performance, in football victory comes only if the entire team plays as a unit. Slow, painstaking development of draft choices and low-profile players is the essence of cohesive team performance. Bringing in a flashy, high-priced free agent often proves a net minus, as the overpriced guy harms team chemistry more than he helps performance. Plus, as TMQ perennially points out, highly hyped free agents who have just signed for a megabucks bonus often celebrate by taking their next season off.

**Upcoming Smithsonian Exhibit: The Luxurious Golden Throne Sat Upon by the Smithsonian CEO:** For two years, TMQ has been complaining that Lawrence Small, secretary of the Smithsonian, paid himself about \$1 million a year though his organization's budget is mostly federal

subsidies and his most challenging responsibility was deciding what to order for lunch. (Congress makes all major decisions involving the Smithsonian.) Last month Small resigned after the Washington Post revealed that he tried to prevent the Smithsonian's inspector general from examining his expense accounts. The expense accounts contained a lot of hot fudge, such as Small and his wife flying first-class to Hawaii for a Thanksgiving holiday and staying at a four-star resort at taxpayer expense. If corporations that are funded by the voluntary choices of consumers want their execs to fly first and stay at resorts, that's fine; but the Smithsonian operates using taxes forcibly removed from your pocket. Last week James Grimaldi and Jacqueline Trescott of the [Washington Post added the detail](#) that Small took \$1.1 million in housing allowances justified on the grounds that his home was used for official entertaining, but then did little entertaining. In 2005, for instance, Small took \$179,322 in tax funds for official entertaining at home but actually hosted only one party for 10 people.

The absurdity of claiming you spent \$17,932 per guest for a dinner party raises the possibility that the departed Smithsonian CEO was little more than a glorified shoplifter. Three of the last four presidents (Ronald Reagan, Bill Clinton and the second George Bush) were elected partly on their promise to change the culture of Washington, making the capital less arrogant and more accountable. Since big Washington institutions like the Smithsonian are still run as personal fiefdoms for top officials, and still raise their middle fingers to the taxpayer, it tells you how little has changed.

**Discounting to Present Value the McGahee Trade:** TMQ is underwhelmed by Willis McGahee, who's a legend-in-his-own-mind type. Football pundits speak of him as a star; McGahee speaks of himself as if he were Franco Harris, but McGahee's [career stats](#) are run-of-the-mill and defenses don't fear him. Still, he's a decent back, which makes me wonder why the same sorts of pundits who praise McGahee also said Baltimore gave up too much for him. The price was the Nevermores' third-round picks in 2007 and 2008, plus a seventh-round choice this week. Because Baltimore's seventh-rounder is choice No. 239, whoever is chosen there will be a long shot to make an NFL roster. If I were the Bills, I'd offer the pick to Denver for \$3 million. Because this year's third-rounder is near the end of the round, it is only slightly better than a fourth-round choice; meanwhile, the 2008 third-rounder discounts to a fourth-rounder. (Future choices discount by one round per year: That is, you'd need to trade your first-round selection in 2008 to get someone's second-round selection in 2007.) In effect, Baltimore gave two fourth-round draft picks for a starting-quality tailback; the Ravens got McGahee for significantly less than the Patriots surrendered for Wes Welker. Anyway, whose front office has done a better job on player decisions in this decade, Buffalo's or Baltimore's?

**If the Lions Did Get the Entire Fourth Round, Would They Improve?** This weekend sports nuts will be yakking about the [draft value chart](#) compiled by Jimmy Johnson when he coached the Cowboys, and often used to calibrate draft-pick swaps. This chart has relevance in the middle but becomes inaccurate at the extremes: that is, it's a bell curve. If a team wants, say, to move from the fourth round to the third, the chart tells how much should be surrendered. But at the top and bottom -- the outlier regions of a bell curve -- the chart becomes distorted.

According to the chart, you should be able to trade a late fifth-round selection for nine seventh-round choices, or trade the first overall selection for 750 late seventh-round picks. (Commencing in the fifth round, selections have impossibly precise fractional values such as 29.4.) According to the chart, if Washington offered the sixth overall pick to trade up for Oakland's first overall choice in order to select Calvin Johnson, the Redskins also would owe Oakland either the eighth overall choice or three second-round picks. No matter how good Johnson looks, it's hard to believe Oakland

would not be better off with the sixth overall choice plus three extra second-round picks. According to the chart, Detroit's second overall selection is worth a third-round choice -- plus the entire fourth round! If someone could offer the Lions the entire fourth round for their pick, even Matt Millen would take the deal. According to the chart, Houston's pick, 10th overall, is worth the entire fifth round -- any NFL team would be better off with the entire fifth round than with the 10th overall pick. And if a third-round pick is really worth the entire seventh round, as the chart says, wouldn't you rather have the entire seventh round?

Here are how some famous trades worked out according to the value chart:

In the Ryan Leaf trade, San Diego gave Arizona 3,310 points worth of picks for a choice worth 2,600 points. (This trade involved present and future choices; I score the future choices as the present year's value divided by two.) But though San Diego lost this trade, Arizona didn't win, as it used the high picks obtained on Andre Wadsworth and David Boston (Wadsworth was a bust while Boston had but two good seasons). In the Michael Vick trade, the Falcons gave the Chargers just 2,210 points worth of selections for a pick worth 3,000 points -- but San Diego came out ahead by using one of the choices on future Hall of Famer LaDainian Tomlinson. In the Eli Manning trade, the Giants gave San Diego 2,920 worth of points for a pick worth 3,000 points. That seems perfectly balanced until you consider how the choices were used. Jersey/A ended up with the phlegmatic Manning while San Diego got Philip Rivers, Shawne Merriman and Nate Kaeding, all Pro Bowlers. Finally, to obtain Jerry Rice, San Francisco gave New England picks valued at 960 points, and got back selections worth 1,058 points. Thus the Niners ended up with more draft value and, of course, with one of football's best-ever players.

**Reader Animadversion:** This winter I received an e-mail from Jamar Cartwright of Chicago, pointing out that in the same paragraph of a 2006 column, I referred to a white college senior as a "collegian" and a black senior as a "prospect." Race wasn't mentioned in the paragraph or relevant to it, but Cartwright found subconscious significance in the choice of terms: "'Collegian' is a positive word, every father wants his son to be a collegian. 'Prospect' implies some sort of automaton, just a machine for running and tackling." He continued, "I can't back my point with hard proof, but I bet that if you paid close attention, you would find sportswriters and sportscasters rarely call white athletes hoping to enter the NFL or NBA 'prospects,' while constantly using this term for young black males." Is this PC oversensitivity or is there subtle coding involved in describing aspiring African-American players as "prospects"? Draft weekend seems a time to test this question, so I will pay attention and ask readers to do the same; file your views at [TMQ\\_ESPN@yahoo.com](mailto:TMQ_ESPN@yahoo.com).

**Incredible Seventh-Round Forecast:** Only Tuesday Morning Quarterback saunters where others fear to tread by going directly to forecasting the seventh round. I'm sure my board will look a lot like yours. But please don't write to complain that I have Drew Mormino going to Kansas City with pick No. 231. In private conversations with scouts and NFL personnel directors over the last few weeks, I've become convinced the Chiefs will take Mormino in the seventh -- not the Dolphins at pick No. 219 like everyone is saying.

211. Oakland. Marvin White, safety, Texas Christian. Note: transferred from Texas Methodist.

212. Dallas. Mark Fenton, center, Colorado.

213. Cleveland. Le'Ron McClain, fullback, Alabama. Has driven from Birmingham to Little Rock in under six hours.

214. Tampa. Michael Allan, tight end, Whitworth. Small-college star projects as a management intern in the NFL. Note: Allan redshirted *in Division III*.

215. Arizona. Tyron Brackenridge, cornerback, Washington State.

216. Washington. Garrett Wolfe, running back, Northern Illinois. Inevitably to be nicknamed "Boy

Who Cried" by Chris Berman.

217. Minnesota. Reggie Lewis, cornerback, Florida. Federal judge overturns Ohio legislature's attempt to outlaw OSU-Florida collegiate sporting events.

218. Houston. Dave Ball, wide receiver, New Hampshire.

219. Miami. Dan Mozes, center, West Virginia. Listed as 6-2 3/8ths, but scouts believe he is really 6-2 1/8th.

220. New Orleans. Jared Zabransky, quarterback, Boise State. Agent says Zabransky will not reveal the secret of the Fiesta Bowl-winning behind-the-back handoff until his bonus check has cleared.

221. Chicago. Gabe Hall, tackle, Texas Tech.

222. Buffalo. Alonzo Coleman, running back, Hampton. Wowed scouts with ability to cut back on household expenses.

223. Tennessee. Corey Graham, cornerback, New Hampshire. Note: Wildcats just flying off the board at this point.

224. Jersey/A. Mike Jones, guard, Iowa. Radio City draftniks howl in outrage that Giants tab Jones with Zach Latimer still on the board.

225. St. Louis. Zach Latimer, linebacker, Oklahoma.

226. Carolina. Nathan Bennett, guard, Clemson. At combine, impressed with a 42.36 in the potato-sack race.

227. Pittsburgh. Corey Anderson, fullback, Tennessee.

228. Green Bay. Joe Cohen, defensive end, Florida.

229. Jacksonville. Daniel Coats, tight end, BYU. Inevitably to be nicknamed "Of Many Colors" by Berman.

230. Cincinnati. Michael Coe, cornerback, Alabama State.

231. Kansas City. Drew Mormino, center, Central Michigan.

232. Seattle. Jay Alford, defensive tackle, Penn State. Joe Paterno told NFL scouts, "I've never seen a kid who hits harder at a buffet."

233. Denver. Xzavie Jackson, defensive end, Missouri.

234. Dallas. Yamon Figurs, kick returner, Kansas State. Inevitably to be nicknamed "It" by Berman.

235. Green Bay. Rory Johnson, linebacker, Mississippi.

236. Philadelphia. David Patterson, defensive tackle, Ohio State. Panics on learning that next fall the Eagles play the Dolphins, a Florida team.

237. Dallas. Kody Bliss, punter, Auburn. Worked summer-stock theater to improve his acting when bumped by a defender.

238. Miami. Brandon Fields, punter, Michigan State. Worked at a dry cleaner's to improve his hang time.

239. Buffalo. Kelvin Smith, linebacker, Syracuse.

240. San Diego. Dante Rosario, tight end, Oregon. Note: seems to have intangibles, but it's hard to be sure.

241. Chicago. Justin Hickman, linebacker, UCLA.

242. Indianapolis. Brandon Harrison, safety, Stanford. Ran a 0.0000003745 on a really fast surface at the Stanford Linear Accelerator.

243. Green Bay. Kasey Studdard, guard, Texas.

244. Atlanta. Jon Cornish, running back, Kansas. Note: Inevitably to be nicknamed "Game Hen" by Berman.

245. Tampa. Brandon Myles, wide receiver, West Virginia.

246. Tampa. Gerald Alexander, safety, Boise State.

247. New England. Stephen Nicholas, linebacker, South Florida. Scouts impressed that he uses proper form when breaking down enzymes.

248. St. Louis. Mike Otto, tackle, Purdue. Holds all-time school record for most used sneakers in a dorm room.

249. St. Louis. Keith Jackson, defensive tackle, Arkansas.

250. Jersey/A. Andrew Carnahan, tackle, Arizona State. Radio City draftniks howl in outrage that Giants tab Carnahan with Uche Nwaneri still on the board.

251. Jacksonville. Uche Nwaneri, defensive end, Purdue.

252. Jacksonville. Mario Henderson, tackle, Florida State. If you act before midnight tonight, you will also receive the amazing new solar-powered Lint Lure.

253. Cincinnati. Stephon Heyer, tackle, Maryland.

254. Oakland. James Jones, wide receiver, San Jose State. Note to broadcast media: name is pronounced "James Jones."

255. Detroit. Bo Smith, cornerback, Weber State. Note: draft guides for 2008 go on sale tomorrow.

**Next Week:** TMQ grades the draft and every team finishes above 4.0 as weighted GPA and advanced placement credits come to the NFL.

**Monday, April 30, 2007**

**Updated: May 1, 11:50 AM ET**

The TMQ draft review

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By Gregg Easterbrook

The incredible ever-building obsession with the NFL draft -- now broadcast live in its entirety by *two* television networks -- ought to make us wonder if America needs its national head examined. The standard explanation for draft mania is that Americans are so utterly obsessed with football, they're willing to spend draft weekend just talking about the sport -- not watching games, merely talking. Another factor is that all 32 teams are active in the draft, and thus all 32 sets of fans have a stake in the day's outcome. When there's a playoff game or a "Monday Night Football" contest, only two of 32 sets of fans have a direct stake. But Tuesday Morning Quarterback thinks a different force accounts for NFL draft mania. Namely, that the NFL draft is a major flashback to high school.

Remember that dreaded moment in high school gym class, when the phys-ed teacher said, "Choose up sides." Two captains were tapped. They flipped a coin to see who would go first. The winner chose the best athlete, or maybe the most popular kid, for his or her side. The other captain chose the second-best or second-most popular. Then the next, then the next, until finally one person was left -- the kid nobody wanted, the kid the first captain had no option but to allow on the team.

Maybe you were that kid, perennially humiliated by being the last one. Maybe you were hot stuff in high school and always picked high. Regardless, the whole "choose up sides" system reeked, always forcing some into humiliation because -- because what, God didn't make them athletic? Gym teachers who used the "choose up sides" system were lazy or cruel, since they knew perfectly well it mortified some of those they were charged to care for. Even if you escaped choosing up sides at school, the system ruled the playground, too. When asked to recount what they hated about adolescence, many adults cite the moment of choosing up sides.

Now we come to the NFL draft. It's choosing up sides on a national level -- but somebody else does the sweating! The same pressure, fear and private anxiety are involved, plus huge amounts of money have been added. The viewer can enjoy this all voyeuristically, reliving the choosing-up-sides moment of youth but without any personal risk. Watching Brady Quinn when the Dolphins passed on him and the Radio City Music Hall crowd gasped -- wasn't the look on Quinn's face the look of the high-school kid who keeps not getting pointed to? That is our secret fascination with the NFL draft. It's choosing up sides in all its meanness writ large, but the viewer is never the one whose feelings are hurt.

In other sports news, the 2006-2007 academic session was the Year of the Smart School in big-deal collegiate athletics. Ten high-quality academics-oriented colleges made the men's NCAA basketball tournament -- Boston College, Davidson, Duke, Georgetown, Holy Cross, North Carolina, Penn, Stanford, Vanderbilt and Virginia. These are schools where the athletes attend class, complete their reading and hand in their assignments on time. At these colleges, if it's a weekday night and you're looking for a guy from the football or basketball team, the first place to try is the library. At Davidson, Holy Cross or Penn, if it's a *weekend* night and you're looking for a guy from the football or basketball team, try the library! Quality academic schools Air Force and Michigan made the men's NIT, and Bucknell should have -- the NCAA snub of Syracuse was nothing compared to the NIT snub of Bucknell, which consistently leads the nation for the combination of elite academics and success in high-level athletics. Superb academic schools Amherst, Brandeis, the University of Chicago, Johns Hopkins, Rochester, Trinity of Connecticut and Washington in St. Louis made the

men's Division III basketball tournament, which was won by Amherst. In the most recent football season, six quality academic schools reached a major bowl: Boston College, Cal, Michigan, Navy, Notre Dame and Rice. Below the bowl level, top academic schools Carnegie-Mellon and Washington & Lee made the playoffs, while Princeton, Williams and Yale would have done so if the Ivy League and New England Small College Athletic Conference did not prohibit members from sending football teams to the postseason.

So it's not a fluke when a serious academic college with genuine student-athletes has a fantastic year in football or men's basketball -- this actually happened a lot in the 2006-2007 university year. If colleges that take academics seriously still can be winners at the big-boy levels, how come at most powerhouse schools academics is a joke and the athletes don't study at all?

And in other football news, draft obsession in newspapers, magazines, on the Web, on sports radio, on podcasts and on cable went over the top this April. Face it: We live in Mel Kiper World. His draftnik mania has gone from a lonely labor to a national consensus, and resistance is futile. I'm certainly surrendering. See below for the incredible series finale of my Mel Kiper Watch item.

Now the TMQ draft review:

**Arizona:** The Cards' first pick was an offensive tackle, their second pick a defensive tackle -- sounds like eminently sensible, old-school football. But this is Arizona, so you know it won't work out.

**Atlanta:** The Falcons' season hasn't even started collapsing yet, and already Bobby Petrino must be thinking that the pleasant, serene campus of Louisville sounds like an awfully nice place to sit around with some polite, attentive young men discussing football. What's the deal with Michael Vick anyway, does he try to think of ways to make himself look bad? Does he have a trouble consultant? Note that No. 1 overall Hokie first choices Vick and Bruce Smith were at Radio City Music Hall as a gesture of solidarity with Virginia Tech, but only the dignified Smith was allowed to speak; the league knew that if Vick spoke, he'd be booed. Standup comics will mine Vick's latest travail. Here's my contribution:

- Now we know why Vick really barks out signals.
- Vick was seen club-hopping with Cruella de Vil on his arm.
- Falcons' new cadence: Sit, stay, hike!
- Petrino halftime speech: "It's not the size of the dog in the fight, it's the size of the dogfight at the quarterback's house."
- Any Atlanta receiver who catches a touchdown pass gets a biscuit. Good receiver! Good boy!
- If Michael Vick says he needs to go outside, you'd better let him.

**Baltimore:** The Ravens have won 17 of their past 24 games, and seem a likely monster team for 2007. Too bad this organization just cannot seem to find the answer at quarterback. Oh, look at the bottom of the Baltimore draft -- Troy Smith!

**Buffalo:** TMQ doesn't understand the trade that sent Takeo Spikes to Philadelphia for Darwin Walker. Walker is a respectable player, but the Eagles were likely to waive him for salary-cap reasons, as they have two recent No. 1 draft picks at his position. The puzzler in the transaction is Spikes, who was the best defensive performer in the NFL in 2004. Then he missed 2005 with a bad injury, and last season he struggled early. Spikes didn't begin to show his old form until the second half of 2006 -- and in that period, the Bills had several big wins while losing to Indianapolis and San Diego, the league's hottest teams, by a combined four points. In the second half of 2006, when

you watched the Bills' defense you thought, "Takeo Spikes is back." Now he's been unloaded for a journeyman. Either Spikes' health remains an issue -- in which case why did Philadelphia want him? -- or Spikes has recovered, in which case why in blazes did Buffalo practically give him away?

**Carolina:** I'll reiterate my contention that the most important move of the 2007 offseason is David Carr to the Panthers. But if things don't work out in Carolina, I'll deny I said it.

**Chicago:** The Bears have been strangely quiet since halftime of the Super Bowl. They wheezed out the rest of the game, have mainly marched backward in the offseason, haven't resolved the Lance Briggs mess (though note that they used a draft pick on Stanford linebacker Michael Okwo, who has the same undersized hyperactive style as Briggs) and appear to be planning to return all their eggs to Rex Grossman's basket. Plus the net of their decision to trade away top running back Thomas Jones was: Dan Bazuin, Garrett Wolfe, Kevin Payne and a 2008 draft choice. I like a 177-pound running back as much as the next guy, but ...

**Cincinnati:** Years ago a standard Tuesday Morning Quarterback line was that if Akili Smith, chosen third overall by the Bengals in the 1999 draft, didn't wake up, "he will soon count himself lucky to be covering punts for the Edmonton Eskimos." As pointed out by Richard Mah of Calgary, among many readers, Smith -- who's been out of football a considerable time -- just signed with the Calgary Stampeders. Good luck covering punts! I'll repeat my other long-ago contention about Smith -- if he'd been drafted in the third round, rather than third overall, he might have been a successful NFL quarterback. The pressure of being a high-drafted quarterback has overcome more than one young man. Expectations will be as much a danger for JaMarcus Russell as will the rushers the Oakland offensive line does not block.

**Cleveland:** Everybody's said this, but I have to second it: Boy, did Brady Quinn take the pressure well. "Dad, he's sweated through his hair gel," noted my son Grant as the middle of the first round approached and Quinn kept twisting in the wind on camera. But though Quinn might have been sweating like crazy, his poise never wavered, and he never got upset. Impressive! As the third hour of the draft passed and the Notre Dame quarterback still was not chosen, TMQ thought: "The longer this lasts the more valuable Quinn becomes, because he's proving he can handle intense stress."

While Quinn was sitting at the green-room table not being picked, all eyes and cameras on him, his mother Robin was holding up admirably too. What was she constantly whispering to him? My guess is she was whispering, a la Skipper of the Madagascar Penguins: "Just smile and wave, Brady, just smile and wave." As the wait progressed Quinn moved out of sight, but it made no sense for the commentators to say he had gone to Roger Goodell's "private" suite. Suzy Kolber interviewed Quinn inside the "private" suite. In what sense can something broadcast live on national television be characterized as "private?" Anyway, if there's anything able to transform the fortunes of the woeful Cleveland Browns (Release 2.2), it's a charismatic quarterback with ice water in his bloodstream. The Browns getting Quinn and Joe Thomas on the same day was a franchise-changing coup.

**Dallas:** The trade-wacky Jerry Jones outdid himself, conducting four swaps involving 15 picks. In trading their first-round choice, No. 22 overall, to Cleveland for the Browns' second-round choice this year and first-round choice next year, the Cowboys reenacted their 2004 swap with the Bills. That year they traded their first-rounder, also No. 22 overall, for Buffalo's second-round choice and first-round choice the following April. In 2004, Dallas seemed to wager that Buffalo would have a horrible year in 2005, and its pick would be in the top five. That didn't happen, but Dallas seems to be repeating the wager, expecting Cleveland to have a horrible year in 2007. Now for the net of Dallas' multiple trades. The Cowboys dropped down four slots in the first round, from No. 22 to No.

26; they surrendered a mid-second round choice; they dropped down 20 slots in the third round, from No. 67 to No. 87; they acquired a fourth-round choice; they surrendered a fifth-round choice; they improved the position of two sixth-round choices; and were left holding Cleveland's No. 1 next April. The many trades simplify as Dallas giving a 2007 second-round pick for Cleveland's 2008 first-rounder, which is a pretty good day's work, if arabesque.

**Denver:** Denver traded up from the 21st to 17th positions to get Jarvis Moss. Cincinnati was drafting at 18th, and perhaps the Broncos feared that because there were clouds over Moss' reputation, he was sure to be the Bengals' choice.

**Detroit:** The best athlete, good student, high character, involved in clean drinking water projects for the developing world -- Calvin Johnson was the superhero of the 2007 draft class. So how could the football gods do this to him? The football gods are testing you, Calvin, by sending you to the Lions. Write and let us know how things go, since no one will ever see your games. Note: Oakland traded a fourth-round choice to Detroit for Mike Williams, whom the Lions would have waived, and Josh McCown, who did not attempt a pass in 2006. Wait a moment -- Matt Millen got the better of someone in a football decision! Doctor, I think I'm feeling faint.

**Stalin Memoir Shocker: "I Always Opposed That Gulag Idea":** When he had a book to sell in 2004, former George W. Bush anti-terrorism advisor Richard Clarke sought publicity by declaring he always had been opposed to the invasion of Iraq. Now that he has a book to sell, former CIA director George Tenet is seeking publicity by declaring there was no case for invading Iraq. Oh -- so the two of you knew it all along, you just forgot to say so! Government officials have freedom of speech -- no one would have stopped Clarke or Tenet from speaking up when their views might have mattered. When silence advanced their careers, they said nothing. Only when they had something to sell did they suddenly loosen their tongues.

**Green Bay** The management question faced by Green Bay is whether to mortgage the future to create one final winning season under Brett Favre, or continue with business as usual. Instead the Packers seem to have chosen to do nothing at all, being invisible during free agency, making no move on Randy Moss and using their first draft choice on an injured defensive tackle. And what was Green Bay thinking spending its second choice on Brandon Jackson? This guy started a grand total of 11 games at Nebraska, then jumped out as a junior after what no one could consider a distinguished collegiate career. The Packers desperately need a premium tailback to take the pressure off Favre and have shown no urgency to get one. Note: Keyshawn Johnson did well for a novice sportscaster, but also garnered the best garbled comment of the weekend's coverage. As Green Bay's pick approached and all speculation was on Brady Quinn as Favre's successor, Keyshawn gushed, "Quinn could lead the Packers into the next millennium." Keyshawn, the next millennium starts in 994 years.

**Houston** In the 2006 offseason, the Texans made a huge quarterback blunder by passing on hometown hero Vince Young. This offseason, they traded two second-round choices for Atlanta backup quarterback Matt Schaub. Last week, I used Rob Johnson as an example of the dangers of trading high picks for untested backups. Many readers including Lily Coburn of Madison, Wis., countered that things worked out pretty well the last time a team traded high picks for an Atlanta backup quarterback -- the Packers giving up a first for Brett Favre. Lily, I'd forgotten: After all, that happened during the Eisenhower Administration, didn't it? But back to the Texans, suppose they'd done nothing leading up to the draft. They could have chosen Brady Quinn at pick 10 and thrilled their fan base, plus retained second-round choices this year and next. Time will tell, but to me it appears Houston has fumbled a major quarterback decision two years in a row.

Did you catch the Madden 2008 commercial that has Reggie Bush saying how happy he is in New Orleans and ends with him declaring, "To all the teams that passed on me in last year's draft -- thanks!" But it wasn't "all the teams," as only Houston passed on Bush; the Saints chose him with the second selection. This is a veiled shot at Houston management and Bob McNair, the Texans' megabucks owner, who derided Bush as a glory guy. The Texans need glory guys! Anyway, events sure worked in Reggie's favor. Right now, would you rather be a football player for the New Orleans Saints or the Houston Texans? Your Honor, I rest my case.

**In Space, No One Can Hear You Yawn** The most annoying aspect of science fiction is that nobody's ever actually dead. Just once I would like to see a sci-fi movie or television series that conforms to these rules: No time travel, no teleportation, no telekenesis and death is irreversible. Last month in its season finale, "Battlestar Galactica" employed sci-fi's worst cliché with particular superciliousness. There was an entire episode of death omens for Starbuck. Then we saw her fly into a deadly energy field, we saw her ship breaking up, we saw her ship explode, we saw her memorial service, and after that the name of the actress who plays Starbuck disappeared from the show's credits. In the season finale \_ Hey look, Starbuck is back! And her ship's fine too! Alive again without the slightest explanation, Starbuck declares, as the cliffhanger for next year, that she has found Earth. When the next season starts, will producers even bother to offer some lame clarification of how she's suddenly OK? But then, logical coherence has not exactly been a "Battlestar Galactica" strong suit.

In the cheesy, fun 1979 original "Galactica" series, the mystery was whether viewers were watching events of the far past -- meaning eventually the characters would find Earth and plant the seeds of what's now civilization -- or the far future, meaning the show would conclude with a vision of human society as super-advanced. The big joke of the series finale was that when oppressed spacefarers finally found our world, it was 1979; the characters aboard the starcruisers had a look on their faces of, "This backwater dump is the mythical Earth?" Presumably, fans of the new series will spend its offseason wondering whether Starbuck found Earth of the past, Earth of the future or Earth of 2007. To make the joke complete, I think she should find Earth of 1979. The fleet arrives to discover Jimmy Carter is president, everyone is in disco gear, Farrah Fawcett's hair shows up on radar, Ronald Reagan is just a washed-up actor, plus circling the planet is an enormous battlestar commanded by Lorne Greene.

TMQ has complained before that on the new series, it is said to be physically impossible to distinguish a person from the cybernetically manufactured Cylons -- so what gives the Cylons their super-strength and ability to communicate telepathically? Telepathy and super-strength would need to be supported by body organs, meaning a medical examination would distinguish a person from a Cylon. This became especially ridiculous in the season finale, when the shocker was the revelation that four of the key human characters were, in fact, Cylons -- they didn't know themselves because they couldn't tell a human from a Cylon either! The robot programmed to think he's human is a sci-fi staple, but this veered into the preposterous, especially since one of the characters who discovers he's a Cylon is in his 60s, and previously it has been declared that human-appearing cyborgs have existed only 40 years. TMQ complains of the many contemporary movie and TV scripts in which once you learn the shocker revealed at the movie's end, what's happened up to that point no longer makes sense. (To cite another cyborg-based example: two-thirds of the way through "Terminator 3," Arnold Schwarzenegger, as the good cyborg from the future shocks the audience by revealing he has been programmed to obey Kate rather than John -- meaning humanity's survival depends on Kate, not John, as moviegoers were elaborately led to assume. But earlier in the movie Arnold ignored Kate and obeyed John!) If four of the central human characters desperately fighting the

Cylons on "Battlestar Galactica" were actually Cylons, all their actions in the first three seasons become incomprehensible. Cheap shocks from revelations that cause previous events to make no sense are lazy writing. The original "Galactica" was cheesy and funny and poorly written; the current "Galactica" is simply poorly written.

Compensating Galactica virtue: the sinister cyborg Model Six, played by [gorgeous actress Tricia Helfer](#), was captured and thrown in Galactica's brig. Her prison garb? Strapless evening gown with plunging neckline. She's in the prison for weeks, and when seen, always is wearing the strapless evening gown.

**Indianapolis:** Super Bowl winners often face this management choice: Mortgage the future for one more run at the Lombardi, or try to maintain a business-as-usual posture. On draft day, the Colts surrendered their 2008 first-round choice in order to help pump up the roster right now. That's what I would have done, too.

**Jacksonville** Since Jaguars are indigenous to Central America, while panthers are found in Florida, TMQ has never understood this team's name. But since the Jags wear alternate all-black jerseys and Peter Parker will wear an alternate all-black costume in the next Spider-man movie, how about a cross-marketing campaign? Change the team name to the Jacksonville Spideys. "Their spider sense is tingling now," announcers could say at key game moments. Jack of the River note: Jacksonville has a troubled quarterback situation and longstanding trouble selling tickets, yet Del Rio passed on Brady Quinn. Byron Leftwich and David Garrard both looked shaky in 2006, combining for only three more touchdown passes than interceptions. After the stunner of Miami not drafting Quinn, I confidently said to my boys, "Jax at 17th. Inconceivable that he gets past Jax at 17."

**Jersey/A** "How come Marty Schottenheimer was fired and Tom Coughlin kept his job?" asked my 12-year-old, Spenser, during the draft. I explained that some questions, such as the origin of the universe, might never have answers. Another question that might never be answered: Who's going to play left tackle for the G-Persons?

**Jersey/B** The Jets traded up with the Panthers to reach the 14th choice in the first round, then traded up with the Packers to reach the middle of the second round. Overall on Saturday, Jersey/B invested a first-round selection, two second-round picks, a third-rounder and a fifth-rounder in transactions that netted just two players, cornerback Darrelle Revis and linebacker David Harris. They'd better be good.

**Kansas City** The Chiefs' offensive line, key to its recent success, began to look shaky last season and now has lost Will Shields. Yet Kansas City did not select an offensive lineman till the sixth round. Does Herman "I Honor My Contract When I'm in the Mood" Edwards know something about his depth chart that we don't? But then, Edwards is the savvy guy who benched Damon Huard after he'd thrown 11 touchdown passes and one interception. For the remainder of the season, the Chiefs recorded eight touchdown passes and eight interceptions.

**Trade Watch** How did some draft trades play out on the [infamous value chart](#)? The Bills-Lions transaction looks like a value-chart loss for Buffalo. To exchange pick 44 for pick 34, Buffalo gave Detroit pick 74 -- a high third-rounder to move up just 10 slots in the second round. The value chart says Buffalo surrendered 680 points to receive 560 points. Comparison says Buffalo was too generous too, since to move up from the 36th pick, in the second round, to the 26th choice, in the first round -- also a rise of 10 slots, but to higher ground -- Dallas gave Philadelphia choices 87 and 159. But Buffalo really wanted Paul Posluszny and was calling everyone at the top of the second round. There is no obligation to trade; most teams in that area weren't selling, so the Bills had to make their offer irresistible. If Posluszny is as good in the pros as he was in college, no one will

ever miss the third-rounder Buffalo expended. Football pundits said the Chargers gave up too much to acquire the high second-rounder they used on safety Eric Weddle: The pundits said "too much" because San Diego surrendered a low second-round choice, a third, a fifth and a third-round pick in 2008. Actually, by the draft value chart, the Bolts won the trade, obtaining a choice worth 530 points for picks worth 500 points -- remember, you must divide by two the value for that 2008 selection, in order to discount to present value. My favorite thing about the value chart is that it assigns absurd pseudo-scientific fractional significance to the concluding rounds. In one of the draft's final swaps, Jacksonville sent three late sixth-rounders to Atlanta for a fifth-rounder, surrendering, according to the chart, 39.2 points worth of picks for a choice worth 31.8 points.

**More Proof of the Decline of Western Civilization** NBC just renewed its deal to broadcast the Miss USA pageant, announcing a [contract extension with "Donald J. Trump"](#) -- oh, so you mean *that* Donald Trump. TMQ foresees, however, the beginning of the end for Miss USA. Previously staged with a Trump-style emphasis on skin, this year the pageant tried to go upscale, nearly eliminating cheesecake; the result was almost no male viewers. Swimsuit photos, previously heavily promoted by Trump, have vanished from the Miss USA Web site. Miss USA is on its way to the dustbin of history.

**Miami** They booed at Radio City, they groaned along South Beach, they dropped their test tubes at the National Academy of Sciences as the Dolphins passed on Brady Quinn -- and they clapped in Foxborough, Orchard Park and Florham Park. New Marine Mammals' coach Cam Cameron turned up his nose at Quinn, and the Patriots, Bills and Jets are glad he did. In the decade since Dan Marino retired, Miami has rolled out 10 starting quarterbacks, and next autumn the number will rise at least to 11. The Dolphins have invested three recent second-round draft picks in their quarterback position, and are likely to have no starter to show for it in 2007. (A.J. Feeley is gone, Daunte Culpepper is likely gone and John Beck is a development project.) Quinn might not be totally perfect in every respect, but fill me in, please, on who is. Quinn's a fine quarterback who was fired up for Miami and has the confident swagger no one since Marino has shown in teal. Brady and Miami would have been a perfect match; the pairing might have returned the Dolphins to power in the AFC East. Peyton Manning, Tom Brady, Ben Roethlisberger, John Elway, Brett Favre: Most Super Bowl winners have a premium quarterback. Miami passed on a premium quarterback because Cameron wanted -- a punt returner.

Ted Ginn Jr. seems like a nice guy, he's fast and the Dolphins have not run a punt back for a touchdown in seven seasons. But when I look at Ginn, I see Desmond Howard. Howard was a great return man in college, and an effective speed receiver at that level. Like Ginn, he was also slight. Howard went with the fourth overall choice, and when he arrived in the NFL could not get off the line: Howard deeply disappointed the team that drafted him (Washington), was waived, and never became a regular receiver, though he was a fine special teams player. Sure I'd like Ted Ginn on my team. But Miami preferred a punt returner to a franchise quarterback? They must have passed out cigars in Foxborough, Orchard Park and Florham Park.

**Minnesota:** The Vikings, who also passed on Brady Quinn, face 2007 with Tarvaris Jackson, Brooks Bollinger and Tyler Thigpen at quarterback. In 2006, Jackson and Bollinger combined to throw two touchdown passes and five interceptions. As for Thigpen, the gentleman is so obscure that until yesterday all his NFL.com prospect page said was: "He's a quarterback at Coastal Carolina." (Prospect pages usually contain reams of detail.) The Vikings ask that [cheerleading candidates](#) use the team's official hair salon, official cosmetics boutique, official photographer and official tanning studio.

**Quarterback Tyler Thigpen of Coastal Carolina Was Drafted; Chris Leak Was Not:** Nobody took Chris Leak, who just led Florida to the BCS title. Sure Leak is 5-11, but in college and high school he threw for 26,086 yards -- most of those throws coming over the outstretched hands of guys just as big as NFL defenders. Drew Brees is barely 6-1, and it's hard to believe less than two inches of height disqualifies Chris Leak from pro football. Nobody drafted Dave Ball of New Hampshire, because he doesn't have a flashy 40 time -- all he did in college was break Jerry Rice's I-AA touchdown records. Rice never had a great 40 time, either. Something tells me Leak and Ball will end up as successful pros, despite the best efforts of the zillion-dollar football scouting establishment to scoff at them.

**New England:** Traditionally the Belichick brain trust banks a high draft choice every year. In the 2006 draft, you knew Belichick was worried because it was smoke 'em if you got 'em -- the Patriots used every pick. This weekend the Flying Elvii returned to their previous management pattern, giving up a late first-rounder to bank San Francisco's 2008 first pick, then giving up a late third-round choice to bank Oakland's 2008 third. If the Patriots are banking picks again, that means Belichick thinks his roster is reloaded: which appears to be the case. Last season, New England nearly won the AFC championship despite having volunteers from the audience at wide receiver. Now Tom Brady will be throwing to Donte' Stallworth, Wes Welker and a perhaps-recharged Randy Moss, while the Pats' roster has gotten stronger in other areas, too. Plus New England is holding two extra high draft picks for 2008. How do these guys do it *so* much better than everyone else?

Moss is annoying, but if his head is screwed on straight he is potentially a major acquisition. You have to think Belichick is challenging himself here. Minnesota couldn't manage Moss, Oakland couldn't manage Moss, most NFL coaches were afraid even to try: if Belichick turns Moss into a team player who hustles, this will be yet more proof he is football's best-ever coach. Note that New England gave twice as much -- a second-round choice -- to obtain Welker as the fourth-rounder it gave for Moss. Who would have guessed a couple years ago that on the open market, Wes Welker would have double the trade value of Randy Moss? And note that with all those decent quarterbacks available in the mid- to late rounds, New England didn't draft one. Brady's understudy continues to be Matt Cassel, who has not been a starting quarterback *since high school*.

**Other People's Good Points:** Gil Brandt of NFL.com showed a [statistical relationship between college games started and NFL success](#) for quarterbacks. On this basis he predicted Brady Quinn, with 46 college starts, has a strong chance of NFL success while JaMarcus Russell, with 29 starts, could be a star but might be a bust. Brandt also noted Kevin Kolb's 50 college starts at Houston are fourth-most ever, predicting success for this little-heralded player, while showing the high-drafted bust quarterbacks tended to be ones who did not start many college games. Akili Smith started 19 times in college, for example. Quarterbacking depends on "reading" the field situation, and it makes sense that the more experience a quarterback had at the college level, the more likely he is to handle the pros. Philip Rivers started 51 college games, and when he took the field for the Chargers, knew what he was doing. Brandt's theory here seems so simple and so well-backed with stats that it is a wonder the megabucks scouting departments of NFL teams did not figure this out long ago.

The most striking and original draft analysis came from Page 2's Ted Kluck, who [broke down many years of first rounds](#) and found that quarterbacks, running backs and wide receivers (in that order) were most likely to be busts, while safeties, linebackers and cornerbacks (in that order) were least likely to become draft flops. First-round safeties, defensive tackles and linebackers had the best odds of reaching the Pro Bowl, while first-round cornerbacks, offensive linemen and wide receivers the longest odds to receive ticket to Honolulu. Kluck's conclusions were striking on several fronts.

One is that quarterback, running back and wide receiver -- the positions that produce the most statistics, and hence the players you'd think we knew the most about -- were most likely to disappoint in the pros. Maybe the stats generated by "skill players" tell you more about their teammates than about them. Next, notice what position appears to be the single safest to draft in the first round, generating fewest busts and most Pro Bowls: safety. And what do draft gurus endlessly say? Don't waste first-round choices on safeties. The next striking aspect of Kluck's findings is that the two positions with the highest first-round success, safety and linebacker, are positions that scouts and personnel managers don't pay much attention to. Maybe the picks in this category are successful *because* NFL personnel directors don't pay as much attention to them as others. Finally, what struck me about Kluck's analysis was its practical value: a general manager could simply use the data as a guide. Kluck did, predicting based on his own numbers that Gaines Adams, Adam Carriker, LaRon Landry, Brandon Merriweather, Amobi Okoye, Joe Thomas and Patrick Willis were the most-likely-to-succeed picks in this year's first round. TMQ will revisit this list in two years to see if he was right.

**New Orleans:** Last year the Saints drafted Jahri Evans from Bloomsburg of Pennsylvania and Marques Colston of Hofstra; both had great rookie seasons. This weekend New Orleans tabbed players from Akron, Kent State, Towson and Wingate. The Saints also have gents from Ball State, Colgate, Drake, North Carolina A&T, Tennessee-Martin and Weber State on the roster, to say nothing of Michael "Beer Man" Lewis, who never went to college. A true meritocracy! At New Orleans it doesn't matter where you're from, only whether you perform. College note: Bloomsburg reassures prospective students "major chain stores and a mall are nearby."

**Oakland:** Chris McKendry and Josh Elliott had a great factoid on "SportsCenter": Since 1990, Raiders' quarterbacks taken in the first, second or third rounds are a combined 5-18 as starters. So your challenge has been laid down, JaMarcus Russell: Can you win more than five games? I mean in your career, not in 2007. Ben Roethlisberger came into a great situation at Pittsburgh and was an instant success. Vince Young arrived at one of the league's best-coached teams and was an instant success. Russell is arriving at, well, let's just say the collapsed section of the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge is in pretty good shape compared to the Raiders. But don't worry, a guy who has never been a head coach at any level is now in charge!

**Hillary Clinton Denies Internet Rumor She Once Put a Postcard Stamp on a Regular Letter:** The shocking truth has been revealed -- Barack Obama has a 20-year-old parking ticket! That expired coupon Obama tried to use at Safeway, the time he got an upgraded airline seat then failed to declare the value of the upgrade on his income taxes: it's all going to come out now. The parking-ticket story was absurd, yet there has been serious discussion about the fact that Obama's middle name is Hussein. This is a weird coincidence -- but strictly a coincidence, so why does anyone care? His father, who died in 1982, was Barack Hussein Obama; the Illinois senator simply carries his father's name. Obama was given the middle name long before "Hussein" had any political connotation. And as with all birth names, Obama was not consulted in the matter! Suppose somebody named Willard becomes a dictator somewhere, would we hold this against Mitt Romney? (Willard is his real first name.) That cable news fixation on Obama's middle name is an indicator of the incredible superficiality of contemporary politics. As was talk radio fixation on the four years Obama lived as a child in Indonesia, since he wasn't consulted about that either. Anyway, Obama spent most of his childhood in -- do you have any idea? -- Honolulu. Strangely, Fox News has not suggested there is a sinister Hawaii connection in his candidacy.

But if voters react adversely to Obama's middle name, he shouldn't hesitate to change it. My middle name is Edmund. My father and grandfather had Edmund as their middle name, my first child's

middle name is Edmund, and I hope that a male child born to any of my children will bear the middle name Edmund. Having middle names run through a family is a nice tradition. Yet names are imposed on children; why should we not, in adulthood, choose the name by which we wish to be known? In several old American Indian cultures, one of the rites of passage was choosing the adult name that would replace your birth name. That's not such a bad custom.

Here are proposed new middle names for Barack Obama:

- Barack Juan Obama (appeals to expanding Hispanic demographic)
- Barack Fitzgerald Obama (energize the JFK nostalgia base)
- Barack Edmund Obama (very classy -- Barack, give this serious thought)
- Barack Pasquale Obama (appeals to traditional urban ethnics)
- Barack Singh Obama (appeals to new urban ethnics)
- Barack Herbert Walker Obama (reaching out to Republicans)
- Barack Baruch Obama (sounds learned, maxes out the multicultural thing)
- Barack Steven Obama (initials appeal to fans of the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra)
- Barack Michael Sean James Obama (insures high voter turnout in Boston)
- Barack Hillary Obama

Speaking of presidential politics, recently I awoke in the night in a cold sweat over this thought: what if the 2008 presidential election ends up pairing Hillary versus Newt? Millions will move to Canada.

**Philadelphia:** TMQ complains ad infinitum (Latin for "by using my AutoText") that the Eagles under Andy Reid simply refuse, as a matter of principle, to build a running game. Year in, year out, Philadelphia lacks a premier power back and does nothing about it. Why should this year be any different? The Eagles did not acquire any of the power backs who changed hands this offseason, and waited till the late third round to tab a tailback. Note: Last fall, the Eagles accidentally paid scatback Brian Westbrook \$3 million more than his contract called for, and *didn't notice*. Philadelphia front office, you will be receiving my invoice for this column soon.

**Pittsburgh:** Lawrence Timmons looked good at Florida State in 2006, but he's a one-year wonder, only starting as a senior. A year ago in the draft, Philadelphia used the 14th overall selection on another one-year wonder from the Florida State defense, lineman Broderick Bunkley, who spent much of his rookie season on the inactive list, totaling six tackles. Florida State front seven guys tend to look good because the Seminoles overload-blitz so much; every member of the front seven gets a couple highlight-reel plays, and those long touchdowns allowed, well, blame them on the safeties. Miami and Florida both had safeties taken high this weekend; these schools play conventional defenses. Florida State plays a gambling defense that makes the front seven look good and the safeties look bad. Something for Steelers' coaches to consider if they discover Timmons has no idea what it means to drop into coverage.

**San Diego:** Once again the Chargers have changed uniform looks, and once again failed to go back to their powder blues, best-looking unis in all sports lore. The football gods have waxed wroth against this team in the playoffs recently, and refusing to return to powder blue is surely not going to restore the football gods' favor.

**San Francisco:** The net of separate deals with the Patriots and Colts was that the Niners moved up from 42nd in the second round to 28th in the first round, in return for exchanging their 2008 first-

round choice for Indianapolis' 2008 first. That's not much to pay for advancing from the middle of the second round to the first round. True, you'd guess that the 2008 Indianapolis No. 1 will come below San Francisco's. But there's no way of knowing that for sure. If San Francisco has a winning season in 2008, this transaction will end up costing San Francisco very little. The trade would cost the Niners nothing at all should San Francisco finish 2008 with a better record than the Colts. Unlikely? Super Bowl winners often suffer a letdown in the following campaign.

**Seattle:** In a cross-promotional deal with Seattle-based Starbucks, the Seahawks will no longer list players' weights: rather, will describe them as either "grande" or "venti."

**St. Louis:** The Rams sent Kansas City a fifth-round pick for Dante Hall, and also flip-flopped third-round slots. But the slots were right next to each other, St. Louis giving the Chiefs position No. 82 in exchange for position No. 84. This trade is so trivial it seems like a gratuity: "There you are my good chap, there's the fifth-round choice we agreed to, and I've put in a little something extra." Maybe the St. Louis and Kansas City general managers were having blueberry-almond martinis as they discussed the trade; Kansas City paid for the martinis, and St. Louis responded by including a tip in the trade.

**Frequent Flyer Pick of the Draft:** Choice No. 37, originally belonging to Washington, was traded to the Jets, then to Chicago, then to San Diego. There were 25 trades involving the 32 picks of the second round.

**Tampa:** They've got 600 quarterbacks at Tampa and have spent several recent high draft choices on offensive linemen. But will they have an offense in 2007? For all the rumors about the Bucs trying to get Calvin Johnson, they ended up with an awfully quiet draft. Given that Tampa was positioned just below Detroit and had plenty of extra picks to offer, if Johnson goes on to become the league's leading impact receiver, Tampa will be remembered as the club that had the television set turned up too loud when opportunity came knocking.

**Tennessee:** Last month Vince Young was named cover boy for Madden 2008. Titans' officials announced that since then Young has slipped on a banana peel, been hit by a falling piano, been stranded on a runaway train, had to jump from a burning building, drove through a huge sheet of glass being carried across the street by stuntmen, suffered amnesia, was mistakenly deported to North Korea, and leaned against a wall that had just been painted. "Vince is a little shook up, but otherwise he's fine," coach Jeff Fisher said, as NASA warned that an enormous asteroid is hurtling directly toward the Titans' practice facility.

**Washington:** The tastefully named Gregg Williams loves safeties. His formative experience was as defensive coordinator at Tennessee, where the Titans' onetime league-leading defense used a modified "46" whose key player was the terrific safety Blaine Bishop. Williams has been looking for another Blaine Bishop ever since. When he was head coach at Buffalo and the Bills held the fourth choice in the 2002 draft, Williams argued hard for safety Roy Williams; Bills' president Tom Donahue insisted on tackle Mike Williams, who became an embarrassing bust. Landing at Washington as defensive coordinator, Gregg Williams convinced the Redskins to use the fifth pick of the 2004 draft on safety Sean Taylor. This weekend, Williams convinced the Redskins to use the sixth pick of the 2007 draft on safety LaRon Landry. They might have a 5-11 club in Washington, but they sure got them some safeties.

Washington has had the fewest draft choices in the 21st century, and this weekend exercised no second, third or fourth pick. But for the first time in modern memory, the Skins did not give up a choice in next year's draft for the quick-fix of a lower choice now. Could this be -- responsible management? And if so, what's it doing in Washington, D.C.?

**My Last Mel Kiper Watch:** Let's face it, we live in Mel Kiper World. Analysts thought ESPN lost its collective mind when the young network put Kiper on the air in 1984 to do color commentary during the NFL draft. But then analysts thought ESPN lost its collective mind simply by showing the draft: Why would anyone want to watch names being called? ESPN draft coverage quickly proved one of the highest-rated offerings in the cable television firmament. Kiper's zany fixation was essential to promoting the draft as a news event; he sent out the message that it was OK to be obsessed about who would pick whom, OK to pour over stat sheets and lists of collegians, OK to dissect fifth-round trades as if they were the lineage charts of the Hapsburgs. Twenty years ago, Kiper and Joel Buschbaum were perhaps the only independent NFL draft analysts in the United States. Buschbaum suffered from fragile health, dying young in 2002 at age 48; he rarely left his Brooklyn apartment, sometimes speaking on sports radio by phone but dreading the words "television studio." Kiper was the one who brought draft mania into the public eye via ESPN. Today the sports business is awash in draft commentators who are almost eerily knowledgeable -- or at least, who appear almost eerily knowledgeable. Draft obsession is universal: There have been more mock drafts on the Internet in the last month than all global warming studies by all scientists combined. The populist sense Kiper inspired -- that you don't have to bow before The Experts, anybody can figure out the draft -- is universal. Today we live in Mel Kiper World.

And the emotional, finger-jabbing, arms-waving, I-am-so-nuts-I-am-about-to-plotz style Kiper helped pioneer has spread broadly in sports television. It's easy to forget but when Kiper was starting off, his brashness was fairly rare in sports coverage. In the 1980s if an NFL team did something he didn't like on draft day, Mel said so in no uncertain terms, frequently overreacting, sometimes becoming so mad he sputtered and his hair shook. Kiper actually *cared* who went to which team -- and if you care about something, you get upset. Now everybody in sports television speaks as if the draft were an emergency meeting of the United Nations Security Council, and everybody gets worked up about the slightest miscue. When Kiper started, sports coverage tended to be reverential. He helped break that taboo.

Kiper's emotion, populism and obsession have been significant forces in the gangbusters economic growth of the NFL. [I wrote last year](#), in full seriousness, "Mel Kiper Jr. has made a greater positive contribution to the incredible financial success of the National Football League than all but a few people in broadcasting." But because Kiper is wacky -- and because many sportscasters and sportswriters are privately jealous of him -- he gets little respect. Television careers don't last forever; Saturday was Kiper's 24th year of draft coverage, and everybody winds down at some point. In the last two drafts Mel hasn't gotten upset about anything, seeming almost strangely approving of almost every choice: maybe that's a sign. But before Kiper should hand over his hair gel to the next generation, the sports business needs to make some acknowledgment of the man's contributions. Yes, Kiper has a goofy demeanor. But the idea he started -- NFL draft obsession -- has been a spectacular success, and of the beat sportswriters, particularly, who condescend to Mel, I don't seem to recall any of them starting an idea that proved a spectacular success.

That said, half the fun of Kiper is beholding him careen all over the map. This year Kiper issued no fewer than six formal mock drafts, plus made innumerable predictions on ESPN television and radio, combining wrong predictions -- "I don't want to say it's 100 percent certain, but it's more than likely the Detroit Lions aren't keeping the second pick" -- with constant self-contradiction. Consider Kiper on Brady Quinn. Throughout fall 2006, Quinn was the top-ranked collegiate on Kiper's "Big Board." In early January, after the Raiders qualified for the first choice and after JaMarcus Russell bested Quinn in the Sugar Bowl, Kiper opined, "Brady Quinn should be a lock to land in Oakland." (Russell at that point had not declared, but was expected to.) In February, Kiper made Russell the

likely first choice, saying JaMarcus had "a better body of work and stronger performances in big games." But Kiper already had seen Quinn's and Russell's games when he said Quinn was better! In mocks, Kiper had Quinn selected second by Detroit, third by Cleveland, seventh by Minnesota, ninth by Miami. Midwinter, Kiper turned against Quinn, saying, "He didn't play his best against the elite teams. Against the elite competition he struggled." Then in April, Kiper started to like Quinn again, calling him "at his best in pressure situations." On draft day, Kiper declared, "They say Quinn didn't perform well in big games, but that's not true," and Kiper proceeded to narrate clips of Quinn performing well against elite competition. He added, "Quinn's problem at Notre Dame is that he didn't have the best players around him." So Quinn failed in big games and succeeded in big games and was the best player in college and also a letdown and anyway his teammates were to blame. And yes, we were all surprised when Quinn slid to 22nd -- I don't claim to understand it. Anyway for the record, here's Mel before the draft: "There's no chance of [Quinn] falling out of the top 10. It's not going to happen."

Kiper on Greg Olsen in February: "He'll be there as a second-round pick. I don't think he played well enough to be a first-round pick." Then the Miami tight end's stock rose when he aced his combine appearance. After the combine, Kiper projected Olsen to go to Chicago at the 31st pick. By March, Kiper began projecting Olsen into the middle of the first round, saying Olsen has "great hands and is very athletic ... he's the complete package." Asked in a chat if Olsen could last till the Bears at 31, Kiper answered, "No chance now. That's not going to happen." By draft day, Kiper rated Olsen the 11th-best performer available. Kiper had Olsen rocketing up from a guy who didn't play very well to a lottery pick, and the gentleman did not appear in a single game during this period! Kiper should have stayed with his instincts: Olsen went late in the first, at the 31st selection, to Chicago.

In different mocks, Kiper had the Cowboys using their first pick on Aaron Ross or Robert Meacham or Reggie Nelson or Dwayne Jarrett or Dwayne Bowe; they chose Anthony Spencer. Kiper had the Saints using their first choice on Chris Houston or Darrelle Revis or Daymeion Hughes or Ross. New Orleans took Meacham, while Hughes, whom Mel also projected as a first-round choice of New England, wasn't picked until Round 3. In February, Kiper said quarterback John Beck would go no higher than the fourth round, while quarterback Kevin Kolb would go no higher than the fifth; then in mocks, Kiper had Beck drafted in the second round and Kolb in the third. (Both went in the second.) Shortly before the draft, Mel offered weirdly specific forecasts such as, "If John Beck and Trent Edwards are still on the board after the first round, the Lions will take one of them with the second pick in the second round." Both were on the board when it was the Lions' turn with the second choice in the second round, and Detroit traded the pick. Kiper said Houston would select a cornerback in the first round, either Leon Hall or Darrelle Revis, and "if both Hall and Revis are available at Houston's turn, it will be interesting to see" which of the two the Texans picked. Both were available, and Houston took neither. Just before draft day, Kiper said Buffalo would chose Patrick Willis in the first round and Antonio Pittman in the second round; neither happened. Kiper projected Pittman to be the third tailback chosen; he was the 10th chosen. Mel projected Brigham Young tight end Jonny Harline as a third-round choice; he wasn't chosen at all. Of course Kiper's predictions were right on many points: He had the Ravens taking Ben Grubbs and the Colts taking Anthony Gonzalez, for instance. But if you predict practically every outcome, you'll be right sometimes by chance! In mocks or interviews, Kiper had Alan Branch going sixth to Washington or 11th to San Francisco or 13th to St. Louis or 21st to Denver or 23rd to Kansas City or 25th to the Jets; as the defensive tackle's stock declined, Mel said Branch was "too physically gifted to slide out of the first round." Branch lasted till the second round. Here's my favorite Mel moment of 2007. Ten days before the draft, he forecast Courtney Taylor as a third-round choice. Late Sunday

afternoon, with only diehard draftniks still tuned in, Taylor went in the sixth round. "Some people had Taylor as a third-round choice, but he lacks speed," Kiper said.

This year perhaps a dozen football writers for major Web sites followed in the master's footsteps by issuing not one, not two, not three but multiple mock drafts, each contradicting the previous. Pat Kirwan of NFL.com inflicted nine mock drafts on the eyeballs of the Web. Kirwan had Jamaal Anderson going to Tampa, or to Minnesota, or to Atlanta, or to St. Louis, or to Green Bay or falling out of the first round altogether; he went to Atlanta. Kirwan had Paul Posluszny going in the first round to Carolina or to Pittsburgh or to New Orleans or to Indianapolis; he went in the second round to Buffalo. Days before the draft, Kirwan had Alan Branch going eighth overall (Branch was not chosen in the first round), Marshawn Lynch undrafted in the first round (he went 12th), and correctly divined just three of the 32 first-round choices. Now that we live in Mel Kiper World, where everyone's a draft guru, in future years TMQ will quit tracking Kiper and annually pick someone else's zany forecasts to unpack.

**Running Up the Score Watch:** As noted by readers including Matthew Freitas, Bridgewater (Mass.) State [beat Newbury College 57-1](#) in baseball. Bridgewater coach Rick Smith kept his starting pitcher in five innings, though Bridgewater led 31-0 at the end of the third, and played only 17 of his 29 players despite the bench-clearing lead. That is some mighty bad sportsmanship on the part of the Bridgewater baseball staff. Poor sportsmanship does not occur in a vacuum -- usually it reflects lack of character -- so here's a question for the college's president, Dana Mohler-Faria: Does Bridgewater State teach character? The school's sports information office gets a round of boos for putting out a [press release boasting about the score](#) -- and waiting until the final sentence to note that Newbury is in its first season of varsity competition. The victor, not the vanquished, should be embarrassed about this game.

**Next Week:** The draft makes the halfway point to resumption of the NFL artificial universe. You've lived through February, March and April without football. Now there is just May, June and July to survive. Tuesday Morning Quarterback will return on a weekly basis in August.

*In addition to writing [Tuesday Morning Quarterback](#), Gregg Easterbrook is the author of "[The Progress Paradox: How Life Gets Better While People Feel Worse](#)" and other books. He is also a contributing editor for [The New Republic](#), [The Atlantic Monthly](#) and [The Washington Monthly](#), and a visiting fellow at the [Brookings Institution](#). You can reach him [here](#).*

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