

NFL 2008 - Week 5

by Joe Mulder

Week 4: 4-9

Overall: 30-29-1

The Smartest Thing I Said Last Week:

After the Michael Vick saga, and after their coach up and quit before last season even ended, the rebuilding Falcons are an admirable 2-1. That said, they could very well be the most underwhelming 2-1 team we've seen in quite a while. They've won two home games against the Lions and the Chiefs, who are not only two of the worst teams in the league but arguably two of the worst NFL teams in years.

When they had to go on the road against a playoff-caliber team they lost 24-9 to the Buccaneers, with rookie QB Matt Ryan posting no TDs, two picks and a less-than-robust 29.6 passer rating.

And lookie here: this week, the Falcons go on the road against a playoff-caliber team in the Carolina Panthers. Sure, the Panthers only managed ten points against the Vikings last week, but the Vikings defense is really good; I'm not sure the same is true for Atlanta's. Carolina gets an easy win.

The Dumbest Thing I Said Last Week:

CARDINALS @ Jets -1.5

"Hey, we went 4-12 last season; what do you think our problem was?"

"Um... I know! Our quarterback wasn't old enough! He was only in his *early* 30s!"

"Hey, you're right!"

And then of course that quarterback goes out and throws like 11 touchdown passes.

Titans @ RAVENS +3

The Titans are off to a flying 4-0 start, and there's talk that they may in fact be the class of the AFC. But wait: let's see just who it is that they've beaten, shall we?

The Jaguars, who got off to a shaky start before winning two close games over two other teams that got off to shaky starts. And besides, Titans-Jaguars is one of those "throw out the records" games that always has the potential to go either way, no matter how good or how bad either team is.

The Bengals... 'nuff said.

The winless Houston Texans, and

The Vikings, a talented team perhaps but a team in disarray, and a team that, even when in full array, is always a threat to lose any game they play, at home or on the road.

So, while the Titans are certainly in the AFC driver's seat and their fans certainly have reason to be pleased, I'm reminded of what Harvey Keitel said in *Pulp Fiction*: "Let's not start [naughty word]ing each other's [naughty words] just yet."

I'll take a flier and say that the Ravens, who admittedly have yet to beat a good team, play the Titans really tough this week, in a brutally boring game to watch. It could be a 2-0 game, this one.

Chiefs @ PANTHERS -9.5

After I spent half of last week's column making fun of Kansas City Chiefs fans and pointing out that, as a Vikings fan, I could have it a lot worse, the Chiefs beat the undefeated Broncos 33-19 while my Vikings went down rather meekly in Tennessee. This was clearly a case of karma kicking me in the nuts, and, I have to admit, I have half a mind to move into a fleabag hotel in Camden County and spend the next few years atoning for the various wrongs I've committed in my life with the help of my dimwit brother. But both of my brothers are really smart, so I'll probably have to think of some other way to heed karma's warnings.

I'd love to start by picking the Chiefs to beat that 9 1/2-point spread this week, but, given that the Panthers just got done beating a bad team at home handily, I've got every reason to believe that they'll beat the Chiefs at home handily.

BEARS @ Lions +3.5

The Lions finally fired longtime GM Matt Millen this week after a 31-84 run of futility, during which the team and Millen himself became something of a laughingstock. Don't be surprised if, on Sunday, the Lions players walk around with a look of satisfaction and contentment like Andy, Red and the rest of the crew that tarred the Shawshank plate factory roof in the spring of '49 as they sat and sipped their ice cold beer and, for the first time in a while, felt like men.

But, sort of like how those Shawshank inmates, after the roof was tarred and the beers were drunk, were still prisoners; the Lions players, after the Millen-firing celebrations have died down, still play for the Detroit Lions.

And I know I said that you can't really know anything until Week 5, and that once we hit Week 5 things should get easier, but, I still don't have any idea what to make of the Bears. Luckily they're playing the Lions this week, or I wouldn't know what to do with them.

Falcons @ PACKERS

POOP READING

Nobody has any odds posted for this game, because nobody's sure whether Packers quarterback Aaron Rodgers is going to play. If I forget to check back Saturday or early Sunday morning before the games to see if odds have been posted, let's assume that I pick the Packers no matter what the line is. If Rodgers doesn't play then it'll be rookie QB vs. rookie QB, but with one of them playing at home with a better team behind him.

But I reserve the right to come back and change my mind once the odds are posted; that's only fair.

COLTS @ Texans +3

Expectations were high for the Houston Texans this year, but they got off to an uninspired 0-3 start. Expectations are always high for the Colts, but they got off to an uninspired 1-2 start. Coming off of a bye week, I have to think that the Colts will regard this game as a must-win and, having had a week off to heal up, will take care of business against an inferior team.

Chargers @ DOLPHINS +6.5

When last we saw the Dolphins, they were throttling the Patriots in New England two weeks ago. They used an almost Boise State-like array of trick plays to throw the Pats off of their game and, for good measure, completely outplayed them as well. Was this just a crazy aberration, or are the Dolphins turning into a half-decent team? We'll see.

And I just don't trust the Chargers.

Seahawks @ GIANTS -7

We may have all underestimated the Giants. Which is dumb of all of us, considering that they're the defending Super Bowl champions.

REDSKINS @ Eagles -6

Even after they beat the widely-agreed-upon best team in the NFL on the road last week, I'm still not sold on the Redskins. Still, a six-point line seems a bit high against an Eagles team with a banged-up running back and a banged-up quarterback, especially considering that the Redskins are coming off of three straight wins over three tough NFC teams. Well, two tough NFC teams and the Cardinals.

BUCCANEERS @ Broncos -3

I guess the oddsmakers didn't get the memo: the Buccaneers are good! And did you see how the Broncos lost badly to the Chiefs – the Chiefs! – last week? To call the Broncos defense "porous" would be an insult... *to pores!*

BILLS @ Cardinals -1

I'll assume the Bills are for real until we see some evidence to the contrary.

And, after last week, I'll assume that the Cardinals aren't capable of holding an opponent to under 56 points until we see some evidence to the contrary.

Bengals @ COWBOYS -17

Who would have thought that Terrell Owens would start running his mouth and prove to be a distraction for the Cowboys, huh? Luckily they're playing the winless Bengals this week, so – as you can do when you're solving for "x" – you can just take the ridiculous, distracting wide receivers on the Bengals' roster and cancel out Owens, leaving us only to ponder the question of whether the Cowboys are better than the Bengals.

Which they certainly are.

Plus, after a bad loss to the Redskins last week, the Cowboys will be *pissed*.

PATRIOTS @ 49ers +3

Before the season began, could anyone possibly have foreseen a scenario by which the Patriots would only be favored by three points going into San Francisco this week? Well, probably, yeah; that scenario would be that Tom Brady got hurt and couldn't play. Way to ruin the setup to this particular blurb; I hope you're proud of yourself.

In any case, it's difficult for me to believe that coach Bill Belichick, a man who seems to have embraced Jesse "The Body" Ventura's old wrestling philosophy*, won't have his team more than ready to go, eager to show the world – or at least the proportionally small percentage of the world's population that pays close attention to NFL football – that the Dolphins loss was a fluke and that the Patriots are still a team to be reckoned with.

* "Win if you can, lose if you must, but always cheat."

Steelers @ JAGUARS -4

Pittsburgh is a deceiving 3-1, with wins over a couple of bad teams, a couple of key players on injured reserve, and a quarterback whose shoulder is being held together with duct tape and rubber bands, Kevin-McHale's-knees-in-the-late-80s style.

One could probably be forgiven for calling the Jaguars "iffy," but this is the game where they turn their season around.

Vikings @ SAINTS -3

At this point it's just easier to pick against the Vikings, unless it's blatantly obvious that you shouldn't. At least then when

POOP READING

they lose I get a check mark in my own personal "win" column for the week.
