

NFL 2008 - Week 16

by Joe Mulder

Week 15: 5-8-3

Overall: 100-119-6

Weird week; there were a bunch of games where the favorites won, but didn't cover the spread. You just can't account for that.

Well, I can't, anyway.

The Smartest Thing I Said Last Week:

Titans @ TEXANS +3

...I think the Texans catch the Titans napping.

Texans 13, Titans 12. Sometimes you just smell those upsets coming...

The Dumbest Thing I Said Last Week:

GIANTS @ Cowboys -3

Man, the Cowboys are a mess.

... and sometimes you don't. Cowboys 20, Giants 8.

Onto the picks...

COLTS @ Jaguars +6

And I get another Thursday game right! That makes two so far.

And by the way, for those of you who doubt my Thursday picks because this column is posted Friday morning, I do put them up ahead of time at <http://athleticreporter.blogspot.com>, just so it's all on the up-and-up. Although, if I was lying about the Thursday games, would I really lie myself to a 2-6 (or whatever it is; I don't feel like looking it up) record in picking them?

Ravens @ COWBOYS -4

I think it's worth noting that this is the final game at Texas Stadium, barring the unlikely-but-not-really-all-that-unlikely-if-you-think-about-it scenario that the Cowboys, as a 5 seed, host the 6 seed in the NFC title game. That will certainly mean something to Cowboy fans, and could very well mean something to the Cowboys themselves – not that a 9-5 team with its playoff destiny in its own hands should need a reason to get up for a game.

And, speaking of 9-5 teams with their playoff destinies in

their own hands... the Ravens!

By the way, is it just me, or is it almost sort of weird that the Cowboys and the Ravens are even squaring off to begin with? Like, other than both being NFL teams, what do they even have to do with each other? I realize they play every four years just like every other pair of inter-conference teams, and I realize that every Super Bowl features an NFC team against an AFC team (that's sort of the whole point of the Super Bowl), but this matchup seems particularly strange to me. Like if a giraffe fought a polar bear or something. I don't know; it strikes me as weird. It's like if somebody said, "hey, I'll come by tonight, we can hang out and watch movies. I'll bring *This is Spinal Tap* and *When a Man Loves a Woman*."

It's probably just me.

BENGALS @ Browns -2.5

At this point in the season, with this lousy Bengals team, it would be a point of pride to say that I picked them to cover the spread two weeks in a row, and they actually did it.

Saints @ LIONS +7

The Saints just don't have anything to play for, other than avoiding the embarrassment of losing to the 0-14 Lions. Will that trump the Lions' desire to avoid the embarrassment of falling to 0-15? What about the fact that, as a group, the Saints players are, collectively, better than the Lions players? Will that have any bearing on the outcome? Can you tell that I don't have a particularly good reason to pick the Lions, and I'm just stalling now?

DOLPHINS @ Chiefs +4

Chiefs fans, be advised: when your team blows a 21-10 lead with less than two minutes to go in the fourth quarter at home, in front of the few thousand fans who have bothered to hang around to watch the end of the game, your stadium officially loses its place in the "Toughest Places to Play" debate.

The Dolphins, for their part, usually don't play that well in the cold, but then again the Chiefs usually play well at home, and haven't lately, so who knows? I say take the Dolphins and feel pretty good about it.

Cardinals @ PATRIOTS -7.5

The last time these two teams played, the Patriots handed the Cardinals a very dignified, respectable 23-12 defeat in a game during which the Cardinals honored the late Pat Tillman, a former teammate who had been killed in Afghanistan. I only bring that up as an excuse to compare that game to a fantastic video clip on the Adam Carolla radio show's website – <http://adam.freefm.com/pages/3376297.php>

POOP READING

– a clip featuring Rowdy Roddy Piper, out on Jimmy Kimmel's deck, applying a sleeper hold to a civilian volunteer, knocking him out while all the while constantly reassuring the man that he'll be fine, patting him on the shoulder, and even stroking his hair.

Now, obviously, if you're Rowdy Roddy Piper, and you're hanging out with a bunch of drunk football fans on a Sunday afternoon, and somebody wants to see a sleeper hold, you pretty much have to oblige. But the circumstances are such that you don't want to do anything more than necessary (necessary, in this context, being defined as "putting a guy into a sleeper hold until he loses consciousness"). Such was the attitude of the Patriots, one suspects, on that Sunday afternoon four-and-a-half years ago when they went to play the Cardinals; they certainly weren't about to lose the game, but they basically won by no more than was necessary. The tenor of that particular win was the same as that of Piper's particular sleeper hold in that clip.

Other than this whole discussion being a contrivance designed to steer people to that awesome video of Rowdy Roddy Piper putting a guy under, this has essentially been me choosing the longest way possible to tell you that I think the Patriots will show no such restraint when they host Arizona on Sunday.

49ERS @ Rams +5.5

The 49ers have looked pretty tough the last month or so.

That's about all I've got for this game, folks.

Steelers @ TITANS +2

The Steelers can't just keep eeking out wins, can they? They could have easily lost their last two; I think they're due for a stinker. And the Titans lost last week, sure, but they lost on the road to a pretty good Houston team that's still alive for the first winning season in franchise history, and is going to play like hell to try to get it. I'm not as concerned as some folks about Tennessee losing to them last week.

The Steelers have been dynamite on the road, but I think the Titans get it done and secure home field advantage throughout the playoffs.

Chargers @ BUCCANEERS -3.5

Wow. The Buccaneers, clinging desperately to the 6 seed in the NFC after having lost two in a row, get to finish out the season hosting the Chargers and the Raiders, two West Coast teams coming east for early Sunday games. The vast majority of the Tampa Bay players, coaches and front office staff must spend the offseason assisting the mentally handicapped, driving for Meals on Wheels, reading out loud to the blind or something similarly magnanimous in order to find themselves on the receiving end of such good karma.

Bills @ BRONCOS -6.5

I know we're all rooting for next week's Denver/San Diego matchup to pit 8-7 against 7-8 with the division title on line, but, as you can see from my previous pick, I don't think it's going to happen.

TEXANS @ Raiders +7

Like I said, the Texans are going to fight like hell to get that first-ever winning record (they're 7-7 now, with two to play). A bit more on that later...

Jets @ SEAHAWKS +4

Much has been made of the fact that the Jets have already made three trips to the West Coast this season, and in so doing have lost to three pretty bad teams (San Diego, Oakland, San Francisco). Much has also been made of the fact that Brett Favre, at 39, is getting less effective as the season goes on.

So by all means, let me get in on some of that: the Jets have already made three trips to the West Coast this season, and in so doing have lost to three pretty bad teams. Also, Brett Favre, at 39, is getting less effective as the season goes on.

Let's not forget either that this is Mike Holmgren's last home game as Seahawks coach. Maybe the boys'll be inspired to win one for him.

FALCONS @ Vikings -3.5

As we know by now, I almost always pick against the Vikings, just as misery insurance; if they lose, at least I got the pick right, and if they win, I'm so glad that I could care less about losing that pick. But they're missing their great defensive lineman Pat Williams this week, Atlanta's got some bruising runners, and I remain unsold on Vikings QB Tarvaris Jackson (I've often said that I feel about Jackson the way a frightened agnostic feels about God: I'm desperate to believe in him, but I'm just not sure I'll ever be able to convince myself that I can).

I would probably pick against the Vikings for real this week, misery insurance or no misery insurance. I just assume they're going to break my heart in an excruciating way; I'm a Vikings fan. That's my lot...

I've related this story before, but here goes again: a few years ago, the whole family was gathered during Christmas break on a Sunday, watching a Vikings team that had only to beat the lowly Cardinals in Arizona to secure a playoff berth. They were leading 17-6 very late in the game, but I said to everyone, "as long as the Cardinals can score, recover an onside kick, score again and win, I'm just going to assume that's what will happen."

And, sure enough, it did. And the Cardinals didn't just come back to win; no, that wouldn't have been painful enough. They came back to win on a last-second touchdown pass on 4th-and-25 (it sounds fake, doesn't it? Like, nobody would believe 4th-and-25, would they?). And for good measure, I'm pretty sure that Nate Poole would have landed well out of bounds, and that the officials blew the call.

So, back to this season: as long as the Vikings can lose their final two games (a plausible scenario, given that they host the Falcons and the Giants) and the Bears can win out and make the playoffs (Monday night vs. Green Bay, on the road against the Texans), I'm just going to assume that's what will happen.

Believe me: it's no fun being this much of a pessimist, but, we Vikings fans have learned that's the only way to survive.

In any case, I'll be keeping a very interested eye on that Texans/Raiders game. I want the Texans to win so that the Vikings, in Week 17, at least have that "let's get our first-ever winning season!" Houston Texans firewall to potentially help them out.

EAGLES @ Redskins +5

The Eagles need it more. They're all but control their own destiny; they need to win out in order to make the playoffs and have either Tampa Bay or Atlanta lose a game. With two games left apiece, that would mean four chances for one of those teams to lose, should the Eagles win out. With me on that? Good.

Washington, meanwhile, is still mathematically alive for a playoff spot, in the same way that I turn 35 on November 1, 2012 and am therefore mathematically alive to be elected president the following Tuesday. And, frankly, as I sit here in my sweatpants typing an internet column about football, I'd give myself better odds than the Redskins.

PANTHERS @ Giants -3

This one is easy enough: the winner secures home field advantage throughout the NFC playoffs.

The Giants might be in trouble, though, having lost two straight and having scored one offensive touchdown in those two games. We probably could have guessed this, but, with Plaxico Burress shooting himself in the leg and all, the loss of one of the Giants' best offensive players has had a negative effect on their offense.

Much has been made over the years – mostly just by me, but still – about the Giants' Annual Late-Season Tom Coughlin Choke Job, which failed to materialize last year. Maybe 2007 was the exception, though, and not the rule.

As for the Panthers, well, they just keep on going, don't they?

(note: I realize that doesn't really mean anything; I just have nothing to say about the Panthers. Sorry. Don't worry; we're almost done)

Packers @ BEARS -4

If I'm going to assume that this season will end in the most brutal fashion possible for Vikings fans, I then must assume that the Bears will win this game. A loss gives the Vikings the NFC North title; let's just say I won't be holding my breath.

But hey, you never know; the Vikings might even go ahead and win on Sunday. Adrian Peterson could go crazy, Matt Ryan could start playing like a rookie quarterback all of a sudden...

Anything's possible, I guess.
