

NFL 2011 - Week 2

by Joe Mulder

Here's what I always say: nobody really knows much of anything Week 1. In fact, you can hardly start counting on anything until about Week 4.

Here's why I always say that: my Week 1 record picking games was 5-10-1. Which is significantly worse than I would have done had I just flipped a coin.

So, as we can see, those of us who *think* we know something in Week 1 actually fare far worse than those who know nothing whatsoever.

The Smartest Thing I Said Last Week:

This year's Chiefs have a banged-up quarterback, a tougher schedule... and a mean that's just begging to be regressed to.

The Chiefs defending AFC West champion Chiefs were humiliated at home by the (previously) lowly Buffalo Bills, 41-7.

The Dumbest Thing I Said Last Week:

I won't pick the Colts, even these battered, broken Colts, to lose by more than nine until they prove they're bad.

The Colts lost to the Texans – the same Texans who have never, ever played in a playoff game – by 27 points. “Swapping out an injured Peyton Manning for Kerry Collins” should have been ample proof that they were bad. Lesson learned.

Let's move on to Week 2 action, shall we not?

Seahawks @ STEELERS -14

It's hard to give away 14 points in the NFL... unless a team is facing Seahawks quarterback Tarvaris Jackson on the road.

And it's not just Jackson; the Seahawks looked just plain bad in general last week (and I'm not just referring to their uniforms, which, since the Buffalo Bills switched to a very appealing getup in the offseason, might be the NFL's worst). The Steelers did too, of course, but so much of that was due to the exhaustively-discussed fact that they turned the ball over seven times against Baltimore. Turnovers are fluky; you can't depend on them or expect that the rate at which they happen will remain the same (well, unless your quarterback is Tony Romo).

There's a decent chance that the Steelers are the great or near-great team we all thought they were prior to last week's shellacking in Baltimore, and if they're even half that good

then only being favored by 14 over the Seahawks is a grave insult.

Raiders @ BILLS -3

Welcome to the Bills bandwagon, everybody! It's a little rickety, and it's awfully cold, and the wheels are creaky from lack of use. Still, there are worse placed to be in this Week 2 of the NFL season.

Who knows; the Cowboys were a pretty crappy team last year, let's not forget, and the Jets were lucky to beat them last week. The Dolphins can always be counted on to screw things up, and even though the Patriots will dominate the AFC with their customary joyless relentlessness it's not that hard to imagine the Bills landing a Wild Card spot this season.

Is it?

Well, maybe that's pipe dream, but opening the season with a 34-point road win over a defending division champ isn't the worst way to kick things off.

As for the Raiders, they were famously 6-0 against divisional foes last season but 2-8 against everybody else, missing the playoffs yet again with an 8-8 record. They beat yet another AFC West opponent last week in Denver, although how impressive that win proves to be is in doubt. The Broncos might be really bad.

Since it would be fun in an out-of-nowhere kind of way to see the Bills make a run this season, I'll go ahead and pick them.

Cardinals @ REDSKINS -3.5

The Cardinals' defense just allowed the greatest-ever game in history by a rookie quarterback making his NFL debut, and the Redskins might actually be good this season. Sometimes it's too easy.

BUCCANEERS @ Vikings -3

I should probably just pick against my Vikings every week, since all they are is a source of endless frustration for me. This game, in effect, is one of two Week 2 “The Loser's Season is Already Over” matchups, although even the winner of this game probably won't contend for a playoff spot.

Let the record reflect, by the way, that I was vehemently against the Donovan McNabb era in Minnesota before it even began. I have time-stamped Tweets and Facebook posts to prove it.

JAGUARS @ Jets -9

At some point, one might be forced to admit that the Jets are

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actually a damn good team, not merely a team that happens to get unbelievably lucky all the time.

At some point, that is. Not at *this* point.

BEARS @ Saints -6.5

The Bears, along with the Chiefs, were a near-universal choice to go from division winner to also-ran this year. With their thorough domination of the Falcons last week, however, the Bears certainly seem like they're a force to be reckoned with.

The Saints looked nearly unstoppable in Green Bay last week, but unfortunately for them the proved to be just a tiiiiiny bit more stoppable than the Packers. Opening up the season with back-to-back games against last season's NFC title game participants might seem a little unfair to New Orleans, but that's what the scheduling Gods decreed. They would have had to face the Packers and the Bears at some point this season; might as well get them out of the way early.

PACKERS @ Panthers +9.5

The Packers looked so good last week (or at least their offense did; their defense had a bit of a long night against the Saints who, to be fair, might be one of the best offensive teams in the league) that the oddsmakers might have to start inventing numbers for them to be favored by. Against the Broncos, Week 4? Packers by eleven. Versus the Raiders in December? Green Bay + 1 gazillion.

The Panther's shouldn't be as bad as the 2-14 record they posted last season but I don't think they'll be good enough to hang with a defending Super Bowl champion Packers team that looks like they might even be better now than they were a year ago.

Ravens @ TITANS +5.5

In Week 1 of the 2003 football season – and this is an example that I will undoubtedly employ at least once a year until I either die or stop making football picks – the Buffalo Bills beat, nay, humiliated, the visiting New England Patriots, 31-0.

The Bills would go on to finish 6-10 and miss the playoffs. The Patriots would lost only one more game the entire season en route to a 14-2 record and their second Super Bowl title in three years.

This is to say that Week 1 can, in certain instances, mean absolutely nothing. This is something I try to remember when making picks, and this is the (thin) reasoning I'm using to defend this pick. How could I pick a Tennessee team that just lost to a bleh Jaguars squad over a Baltimore unit that just got done destroying the defending conference champs?

Well, this is the pick I'd be making if Week 1 had never happened, and I'm just choosing, in this instance, not to put a lot of stock in either team's opening game. We'll see if I'm right.

Chiefs @ LIONS -9

So, doing a complete 180 and assuming Week 1 taught us anything, I was right about the Chiefs. They're bad. I was not so right about the Lions, who won ugly in Tampa and are considered to be a playoff contender.

"I guess a sign of a good team is you can have those mistakes and still come out with a win," Lions coach Jim Schwartz said of his team's victory over the Buccaneers last Sunday. After reading this quote and watching Minnesota make a few mistakes in a winnable road game in San Diego and blow it, every Vikings fan silently hung his head and cursed his fate.

As crazy as it sounds, the Lions may well be a good team. The Chiefs, at least based on what we saw last week, may well not.

BROWNS @ Colts +1.5

The Browns may have ruined a full 35% of all suicide pools nationwide, but I'm not sure the Colts can ever be trusted again.

COWBOYS @ 49ers +3

The Cowboys spent Week 1 farting away a game they should have won, one the road, against what has been of the NFL's elite teams the last few years.

The 49ers spent Week 1 winning by a deceptively large margin at home against what might be one of the worst teams in football (Seattle), a team that, by signing Tarvaris Jackson before the season started, was essentially calling "dibs" on Andrew Luck.

This isn't a tough pick, is what I'm saying.

BENGALS @ Broncos -3.5

Look... I'm no expert (as I prove on a weekly basis). If you want an expert, go read Gregg Easterbrook over at ESPN.com's Page 2.

Alls I know is that the Bengals looked good on the road last week, and the Broncos looked lousy at home. And now the Broncos are favored by more than a field goal? Really?

Chargers @ PATRIOTS -6.5

It's easy to forget that the Patriots haven't won a Super Bowl since February of 2005, isn't it? I think we all just assume that they win everything, all the time; but that's not exactly

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true of late. It's kind of like how we all still think of Harrison Ford as a gigantic movie star, but then if you take a gander at his IMDb page...

Anyway, I've spent the better part of a decade assuming that the Patriots are always going to win, all the time, so why stop now?

Texans @ DOLPHINS +3

Remember how we talked about how turnovers are fluky, and you can't necessarily expect them to keep happening? Well, the main reason that the Texans beat the Colts 34-7 last week was because of turnovers.

And the Dolphins lost decisively at home, yes, but it was to the Patriots. An elite team. Are the Texans an elite team? Time will tell, but despite last week's elite-looking performance I'm not quite sold.

EAGLES @ Falcons +1

The Eagles looked like they would have handled the Rams just fine last week even if the Rams' best wide receiver, running back and quarterback hadn't gotten hurt.

Whereas the Falcons' top-notch wide receiver, running back and quarterback were the picture of health as they got run off the field by the Bears, who were supposed to be bad.

RAMS @ Giants -6

The Rams are supposed to make the playoffs (and, granted, that team is a walking MAS*H unit right now. But still). The Giants might be the worst team in the NFC East.

And yet the Giants are favored by six.

Sometimes it's like Vegas *wants* to give away free money!

And with that hilariously overconfident prediction, I bid you goodbye and good luck.

Until Week 3...
