

### NFL 2011 - Week 7

by Joe Mulder

Last week: 4-8-1

Overall: 38-48-3

So I went 4-9 last week, and went 4-8-1 this week. I love how I improved, but by the absolute smallest margin possible.

Once again, I contend that my picks were actually correct; the games just didn't go the ways they were supposed to.

The Smartest Thing I Said Last Week:

Do you know how you know a team is bad? When they're 14.5-point underdogs even though they're rested up coming off their bye week, and you still double-check the line because you think it should be way, way higher.

I was talking about the Rams being 14.5-point dogs to the Packers. The undefeated Packers almost – ALMOST – looked mortal in Green Bay on Sunday, but still beat the Rams by 21.

The Dumbest Thing I Said Last Week:

TEXANS @ Ravens -9

You don't want to give away nine points in a game that's destined to be something of a shaky-quarterback-off.

Despite my horrific record last week I actually didn't say anything all that stupid, even in retrospect. I picked that statement because it was the most far off I was on any game, I think; the Ravens actually ended up winning by 15.

CHARGERS @ Jets +1

I wondered if people would think the Jets were good again after they handled a bad Dolphins team pretty easily. Apparently, people do not.

Also: started 2-5, ended 9-7. Started 2-3, ended 13-3. Started 4-8, ended 8-8 (and won a playoff game). Started 5-5, ended 11-5. That's how the Chargers have fared in their previous four seasons under current head coach Norv Turner. That's too big a pattern to be a coincidence; they always finish strong (think of Turner as, like, the anti-Dennis Green. Except when it comes to having his teams choke in the playoffs. Then he's like the co-Dennis Green).

Anyway, this year the Chargers are 4-1 to begin with, so, good Lord. If that's their "slow" start, everybody else could be in trouble.

Bears @ BUCCANEERS +1 (In London)

You can only say that the Bears have beaten anybody good if you're willing to say that Atlanta is good. Other than that, the Bears haven't looked impressive. The Buccaneers are playoff contenders, and they're also the youngest team in the league and therefore the least likely team in the NFL to harbor lingering bitterness against our former colonial oppressors as they prepare to play in England on Sunday.

SEAHAWKS @ Browns -3

The Browns have yet to beat a team that's won a game this year. So, there's that.

And I think we were all more than happy to call the Seahawks the worst team in the league despite the fact that last year they beat the defending Super Bowl champions in the playoffs. Seattle has no starts on offense, their playoff berth was arguably undeserved as they were only 7-9, and Pete Carroll turned out to be kind of a slimeball in the way he left USC. So, lots of reasons for the football fan who normally doesn't give a crap about the Seahawks to root for their failure this season.

But now they're 2-3 (bad, but not *that* bad), rested up from their bye week, and headed into Cleveland to take on a Browns team that's clearly suffering from the "Madden curse."

This is like free money!

Falcons @ LIONS -3.5

First of all, how delightful was the whole dustup between head coaches Jim Schwartz and Jim Harbaugh after last week's Lions/49ers game, huh? Schwartz, judging that his hand had been improperly shaken, charged at Harbaugh and started shouting at him, and the two had to be separated before somebody started throwing punches.

I just thought that the whole thing was sort of a quiet victory for people who tend to be socially awkward. It was a sort of vindication of the fear that basic, everyday societal interactions like handshakes *can*, in fact, be mishandled to such a degree that it literally starts a fight.

This is the game where we find out if the Lions are contenders or simply operating under the pretense that they are contenders; the Falcons are just so-so, and the Lions should really take care of them. I don't feel entirely confident that they will, but, hey. You've got to make a pick sooner or later.

Texans @ TITANS -3.5

The Titans are at home, coming off a bye week, and I think they're better than the Texans to begin with. Let's please

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never underestimate the Texans' ability to rope us in and then turn out not to be good after all. That usually starts to become apparent this time of year, in fact.

### REDSKINS @ Panthers -1

Panthers rookie phenom Cam Newton has gotten quite a bit of attention so far this season, but he's gotten only one win. The Panthers just aren't that good and perhaps teams are starting to figure out how to stop him, like Mr. Incredible figuring out how to fight that giant evil robot ball thing. Although I guess that metaphor only works if at the end a gigantic version of Cam Newton starts marauding through the city streets, stomping on stuff and ruining anything its path. Which, given the look of these "Occupy Wall Street" folks I've been seeing all over the news lately, is something I just now decided I totally want to happen.

Garnering less attention has been John Beck, who was the Redskins' presumptive starter going into the season but was outplayed by Rex Grossman for the starting job (for you non-football fans, getting out-quarterbacked by Rex Grossman would be like getting out-acted by Keanu Reeves, or out-pretty-voiced by Bob Dylan). He'll be arguably the least focused-upon of the quarterbacks making their 2011 starting debuts, but he'll be a key for the 'Skins nonetheless.

I think the Redskins will take this one but I'm not sure about their prospects going forward. I'm to sure how effective Brigham Young alum Beck will be, but as we're in the process of finding out, nobody would ever turn to a Mormon to head up a cherished Washington, DC institution unless there were simply no other viable alternatives anywhere, no matter how hard you looked.

### BRONCOS @ Dolphins -1

Tebow! Florida! Florida! Tebow! Tebow! Tebow! Back in Florida!

(That's all I have to say about this game; I wanted to be literally the one single forum that gave Tebow less ink than John Beck this week. Just to do it)

### STEELERS @ Cardinals +3.5

I should really go back and check to see what my record is in the games where I have to triple-check the point spread because I can't believe that's the actual number. I think it's pretty good. The Cardinals should be like ten-point underdogs here.

### Chiefs @ RAIDERS -4.5

It was quite a fitting tribute to the last years of the Al Davis era that the Raiders this week made a trade that was widely regarded as one of the worst in NFL history. They acquired Carson Palmer – who might actually be the *second*-best

Heisman Trophy-winning USC quarterback currently on an NFL roster, and that's saying something – for a first round draft pick and a second-rounder that would become a first rounder if the Raiders win a playoff game this season.

Here's how that must have gone...

Bengals owner Mike Brown, last spring: "Carson Palmer's under contract with us. I'll be damned if I'm going to cave in to his petulant demands and trade him somewhere else when we've got a deal in place that he should honor..."

[Six months go by]

[The Raiders offer Cincinnati potentially two first-round draft picks for Palmer, without whom the Bengals are doing just fine this year]

Mike Brown, Tuesday: "Let me finish! Let me finish; I'll be damned if I'm going to cave in to his petulant demands... unless somebody's crazy enough to offer us two top draft picks for him."

Having said that, the Raiders' last lost to an AFC West opponent on November 15, 2009, and I think they'll keep that winning streak alive against Kansas City.

### PACKERS @ Vikings +9

As we've seen, my record for predicting what's going to happen in the NFL isn't what you'd call "pristine," or "good," or "even close to as accurate as random guessing would get you." So when even I can see that something is clearly and obviously going to turn out a certain way, and then it does, that means pretty much everybody should have been able to see it, too.

But we move on from Donovan McNabb now, from the guy whose tenure as Vikings quarterback was statistically indistinguishable from those of Spergon Wynn and Kelly Holcomb, and, much like Martin Luther, we usher in The Christian Ponder Era.

The Vikings will continue to stink this year and they won't come close to beating the Packers on Sunday, but at least in the next few weeks we should get to see whether there's any chance that Ponder will be as good at playing quarterback in the NFL as he is at being impossibly dreamy. Although he could win the next ten Super Bowls in a row and that still might be a close call (*sigh*).

### RAMS @ Cowboys -13

I couldn't imagine ever taking the Rams again this year, no matter how high the number got. But the Cowboys this year are 2-3 and their games have been decided by 3, 3, 2, 4 and 4 points. I couldn't in good conscience pick them to beat the St. Louis Cardinals by 14 points in a football game, let alone the

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Rams.

COLTS @ Saints -14

I'm going to keep taking the Colts; I've run out of reasons to try to explain why, though.

RAVENS @ Jaguars +9

I wonder if young, rich, unmarried Jacksonville rookie quarterback Blaine Gabbert or young, rich, unmarried Minnesota quarterback Christian Ponder spends more time fantasizing about being the most recognizable face on the roster of Los Angeles's new NFL team. Because you know they both spend a *ton* of time fantasizing about that; I just wonder which one spends more.

Oh, and: Ravens are good, Jaguars stink. #Analysis

See you next week.

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