

NFL 2011 - Week 8

by Joe Mulder

Last week: 2-10-1

Overall: 40-58-4

Let me just point out that my fantasy football team is 6-1 (thought soon to be 6-2; all fantasy players must pay the bye week piper at least once a season, and this week my number is up), tied for first place in my 12-team league, based almost entirely on the strength of guys I drafted rather than lucked into. So, it's not like I don't know *anything* about the NFL, despite what my record in picking games would suggest.

The Smartest Thing I Said Last Week:

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.

I was talking about the Cardinals only being 3.5-point underdogs to Pittsburgh. I said they should be ten-point underdogs, and they lost by 12. So, not far off there. Also, there wasn't a lot of competition in the Smartest Thing I Said Last Week department, seeing as how I only picked two games correctly (well, with one push).

The Dumbest Thing I Said Last Week:

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

Not necessarily dumb on its face, just to pick one team to beat the point spread in any given game. Has to take the prize, though, just in the sheer magnitude by which I was off. The Colts were 14-point underdogs and I picked them, meaning I was basically picking them to lose by 13 points at the most.

They lost by 55.

Let's move on. It's a new week; and hey, if I don't know what I'm talking about at all, I'm just as likely to go 10-2-1 as 2-10-1, right? Um... right?

SAINTS @ Rams +13.5

There are going to be quite a bit of high lines this week, which makes sense given that you could argue there's only one game on the entire slate (Steelers/Patriots) that features two decent teams playing each other.

The only case you could make against the Saints this week is that they simply might be too tired from beating the Colts 62-7 on Monday night. 13-and-a-half points is a lot, in any

NFL game, at any time, against any team. But against a winless Rams team that quite literally gave up against the Giants in Week 2 and hasn't looked competitive since? It feels a little bit more comfortable. Rams games are like Woody Allen movies at this point; they happen at reliable intervals and they do tend to feature a couple of big stars, but they aren't as good as they used to be and nobody really wants to watch them anymore.

Dolphins @ GIANTS -9.5

We'll save the Tim Tebow talk for later (as difficult as *that* wait's going to be).

It sure feels weird that, with all the talk about the Eagles and with the hot start the Redskins got off to and the Cowboys doing their annual "sort of seem really good without actually turning out to be that good" routine, the 4-2 Giants are the ones in first place in the NFC East. It's a weird division this year; it seems like any of the four teams could finish anywhere from first to fourth place and you wouldn't be surprised (well, if the Redskins finished first or second I guess you'd be surprised a little).

And if it seems weird that the Giants are in first place, that's probably because they might not be all that good. They were lucky to get their last two wins, and those wins were sandwiched around an embarrassing home loss to the lowly Seahawks.

But, they're playing the Dolphins. It's a close race between the Dolphins, Colts and Rams for Worst Team in the League status, and nobody else is really even in the discussion. So this is one of those games (as is the previous one, Rams/Saints) where you just make your pick and then afterwards, if you're wrong, you can say to yourself "Well, what the heck was I supposed to do... pick the *Dolphins*?"

JAGUARS @ Texans -9.5

If there's been one constant in the NFL in the last decade other than the Patriots' consistently mirthless excellence, it's probably... well, it's probably the Ravens defense. But if there's been one *other* constant, it's been maybe the Pittsburgh defense. Okay, and Peyton Manning. You know what? Let's comfy chair this bad boy and start over...

Amongst the most constant features of the NFL over the past decade has been the following: whenever the Houston Texans start to look like they're ready to wear the daddy pants, without fail they regress almost immediately.

Now, they still might win the AFC South almost by default. They still might make the playoffs, and they might not even end up with that bad a record in the end.

But with divisional foe Jacksonville coming off an out-of-nowhere Monday night win over the powerful

Ravens, this is without a doubt a Daddy Pants game. And until the Texans win one of those...

Cardinals @ RAVENS -12.5

I think that the aforementioned out-of-nowhere loss to the Jaguars sort of took care of the possibility that the Ravens will bring anything other than their "A" game, even if a "C-" would probably be all it would take to beat the Cardinals.

Although at this point you've got to have serious misgivings about giving away 12.5 points in any game involving Ravens QB Joe Flacco. He's looked so dreadful the past few weeks that you wonder how long it's going to be until the Ravens just start punting the ball away on first down because they're actually more likely to score with their defense on the field, like the SCLSU Mud Dogs at the end of *The Waterboy*.

VIKINGS @ Panthers -3.5

This could actually be a pretty damn good game. Good if completely inconsequential, featuring as it does two teams with a combined 3-11 record. Of those 11 combined losses, though, only two have been really all that bad. And you've got a great matchup of rookie quarterbacks, Christian Ponder and Cam Newton, both of whom fans are hoping become the face of the franchise for the next decade.

And if your franchise is going to have a face, needless to say you could do a lot worse than Christian Ponder's. Am I right, ladies?

COLTS @ Titans -9

I wonder if a team that lost by as many as 55 points the previous week has ever played a team that lost by as many as 34 points the previous week. That has to be unprecedented in the history of the NFL, doesn't it?

In related news: I seriously can't stop picking the Colts, you guys. It's like a thing, at this point. But I swear, they've got to cover sooner or later, don't they?

Lions @ BRONCOS +3

It's not that I'm drinking the Tim Tebow Kool-Aid, it's more that my Lions Kool-Aid is wearing off.

So, as you may have heard, Tim Tebow led the Broncos to a comeback of historic proportions in Miami last week. The weird part is how little you heard about the fact that with three minutes to go, Tim Tebow had his Broncos trailing the winless Dolphins by 15 freaking points! But, as was breathlessly reported all week, no team since the 1970 NFL-AFL merger in 1970 had ever come back from as many as 15 points down with as little as three minutes remaining to win a game.

This is where you have to lament the state of journalism in particular and, really, of America in general; nowhere (but here!) did anybody point out that prior to the NFL's adoption of the two-point conversion in 1994, coming back from a 15-point deficit was, for all intents and purposes, impossible. Before the two-point conversion, being down 15 meant having to score three times. Which, in an end-of-the-game scenario, means recovering two onside kicks and engineering three scoring drives. So, basically, doing all the miraculously unprecedented shit that Tim Tebow did on Sunday in Miami... and then doing it *again*. It was crazy and impressive, especially given how badly Tebow had played for the entire game prior to the comeback, but let's give some context here, folks.

(It reminded me of nothing so much as when the Arizona Cardinals hosted a playoff game three years ago and everybody kept saying it was the first playoff game the Cardinals had hosted since moving to Arizona in 1988. Which was true... but it was also the first playoff game the Cardinals had hosted, period, since 1947. And nobody seemed to ever mention that. What's up, people? Come on.)

As far as the Lions go, how delightful is it to have so purely, delightfully evil and detestable a sports villain in our lives as Detroit defensive lineman Ndamukong Suh? I mean, the guy actually taunted Falcons quarterback Matt Ryan last week as Ryan lay writhing on the turf after a gruesome-looking injury (Ryan wasn't badly hurt, but nobody knew that at the time) and then later in the week said it was "karma" that Ryan was injured stepping on the foot of his own offensive lineman since, the Falcons play dirty. That's like when a bad guy pro wrestler spends the entire match cheating and then, having been beaten cleanly by the fan favorite, gives an interview about how he was cheated. And Suh knows he's full of shit, too, is the beautiful part about it (if you ever hear him interviewed, it takes about two seconds to realize that he's way, way to smart to believe anything he's saying). I don't think pro sports has had anybody this wonderfully awful since Bill Laimbeer (who also played in Detroit, as luck would have it).

Villains make us love our heroes even more; long live Ndamukong Suh.

Redskins @ BILLS -6

The Bills are in the midst of a four-game stretch of their schedule during which they play three different teams they've lost to in the Super Bowl. I can just about guarantee you that hasn't happened before, mainly because based on the way the NFL puts together its schedule the Bills are the only team who could possibly ever do that.

BENGALS @ Seahawks +1.5

Ordinarily I'd take the Seahawks with their huge home field advantage, but we're not sure if quarterback Tarvaris Jackson

POOP READING

is playing or not, or if it'll be Charlie Whitehurst. And as a guy who watched him play for the Vikings for a few years I can definitely tell you that when you're actually *hoping* Tarvaris Jackson is healthy enough to play, you know your season isn't going well.

It's probably for the best that the QB uncertainty is talking me out of picking the Seahawks; they're coming off a game where they scored a grand total of three points, and the Bengals have the #2 ranked defense in the entire league.

PATRIOTS @ Steelers +3

This is definitely the best game of the week, if not one of the best of the year. Too bad I'm getting tired and this thing is already long enough as it is.

Browns @ 49ERS -9

Cowboys @ EAGLES -3.5

Chargers @ CHIEFS +3.5

Have fun!
