

UNASSUMING MIKE SMITH HAS FALCONS SOARING

January 16, 2011

Pro Football **WEEKLY**



No-name backfield

The Patriots rode the unheralded duo of BenJarvus Green-Ellis and Danny Woodhead to a top-10 rushing finish in 2010

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BenJarvus Green-Ellis has bolstered the Patriots' offense.



Mike Smith has overseen the Falcons' rise to NFC's best.

FEATURES

COVER STORY **12**

Two no-name backs with great names, BenJarvus Green-Ellis and Danny Woodhead, have proven to be perfect fits in the Patriots' re-tooled and explosive offense.

STEADY AS HE GOES **14**

The Falcons' third-year coach quietly and effectively has directed his team to the top of the NFC South. We take an in-depth look into why Smith is just the man to take Atlanta to the next level.

GROWING COMFORT **16**

Acquired to be the Bears' franchise QB for years to come, Jay Cutler is excited to be starting his first playoff game.

NO SURPRISE **18**

By naming Leslie Frazier as the eighth head coach in franchise history, the Vikings gave a good man a deserved opportunity to run the show. Plus, find out how Jason Garrett was destined to be head man in Dallas.

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THE PFW SPIN Be sure to visit often to read our in-depth analysis of the biggest NFL news stories. Find out how the news affects both player and team in the short term and in the big picture.

TOUCHBACK Mike Beacom looks back at the 1980 Raiders' remarkable run to the Super Bowl, becoming the first wild-card champion.



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THE WAY WE SEE IT

Our weekly take on the hottest topics from around the NFL.

GOOD WEEK FOR NFC WEST



Jim Harbaugh hopes to have more success than Pete Carroll in following the same path from the Pac-10 to the NFL.

Seahawks' stunner, Harbaugh hiring opens eyes

Forget about any given Sunday.

As was the case on any given Tuesday, when the Vikings and Joe Webb rained on the Eagles' parade, the Pete Carroll-led Seahawks' stunning upset victory over the defending Super Bowl-champion Saints proved that even the biggest of underdogs can go the distance on any given Saturday, too.

Saturday was when Carroll's highly successful USC teams worked most of their magic, and with a raucous Qwest Field crowd cheering them on, his fired-up Seahawks team was hardly the pretender it was so widely perceived to be in last weekend's pulsating playoff opener. Seattle methodically slashed away at

the Saints' undermanned defense with a lot of different weapons on offense and seemed to have at least five players around the ball on every defensive play.

It was a classic case of extra energy making the difference, as well as a statement-making victory for the NFC West, which one day earlier appeared to be strengthened considerably when the 49ers wasted precious little time hiring Jim Harbaugh to become the team's 18th head coach.

Seeming like a perfect fit after excelling at Stanford, Harbaugh and Carroll make the division doubly intriguing with their ultra-successful collegiate backgrounds. — *Dan Arkush*

FLASH IN THE PAN?

Chiefs will be hard-pressed to make playoffs in 2011

The Chiefs might have been the best team in the AFC West this season, but an elite club they are not — yet. That was very evident against the Ravens, when Baltimore turned the wild-card playoff game into a one-sided affair in the second half to send K.C. home a 30-7 loser. By making the playoffs in Year Two of the Scott Pioli-Todd Haley era, the Chiefs' rebuilding project is developing faster than expected, but it's premature to call them a Super Bowl contender in 2011. Only one of their 10 wins came against a team with a winning record, and they were blown out by the Broncos and Raiders. With a much tougher schedule on the horizon next season, it wouldn't be a shock to see the Chiefs take a step back and miss the playoffs. — *Michael Blunda*

NIGHT AND DAY

Packers ready to avenge earlier loss to Falcons

After the Falcons beat the Packers in a playoff-like environment back in Week 12, Falcons WR Roddy White said, "I have no plans of going to Lambeau Field in January. I plan on staying right here and sleeping in my own bed in the playoffs." Wish granted. But now White and the well-rested Falcons have to face one of the gutsiest and well-oiled teams left in the playoffs. The Packers come in as a confident road club, more diverse than in the first game (when Aaron Rodgers was the leading rusher with 51 yards) and ready to beat the Falcons. Rodgers led the best drive of his career in that game, a 90-yard beauty in the final minute, only to see the Packers' special teams wash it away. This time, Rodgers will come out on top — in the comfy confines of the Georgia Dome. — *Eric Edholm*

WHAT ADVANTAGE?

Comforts of home don't help in wild-card round

Before the playoffs began, some wondered if the NFL should restructure the playoffs so that division winners don't automatically play at home in the wild-card round, instead giving that honor to the team with the superior record. Last weekend proved that argument is meaningless. Home teams were 1-3 in the playoffs' first four games, with the lone win coming from the Seahawks, the only sub-.500 team to ever make the postseason. The Jets, Ravens and Packers proved that superior teams will generally prevail, even in hostile environments such as Indianapolis, Kansas City and Philadelphia. Seattle did benefit from its 12th Man, but not enough to warrant an overhaul of the postseason format. — *Eli Kaberon*

2011 NFL DRAFT ORDER

* — Subject to playoffs.

RANK THE SKINNY

- 1 Carolina Panthers** Suffered biggest loss of year when Andrew Luck returned to Stanford.
- 2 Denver Broncos** Might have to consider Patrick Peterson with Champ a free agent.
- 3 Buffalo Bills** Need to repair run defense, first and foremost.
- 4 Cincinnati Bengals** Can only hope this year's rookie class performs like 2010's.
- 5 Arizona Cardinals** Is the quarterback of their dreams worth taking with fifth pick?
- 6 Cleveland Browns** Sure could use a big wide receiver.
- 7 San Francisco 49ers** Jim Harbaugh is a quarterback short of a very good offense.
- 8 Tennessee Titans** One of many teams suddenly looking for future at QB spot.
- 9 Dallas Cowboys** Three of team's top four DEs played on one-year deals in 2010.
- 10 Washington Redskins** Itching to get the next John Elway, but is that QB available?
- 11 Houston Texans** Will be interesting to see if team goes 3-4 route on defense in draft.
- 12 Minnesota Vikings** Other than QB, safety appears to be biggest immediate concern.
- 13 Detroit Lions** Could draft linebacker, corner or safety early.
- 14 St. Louis Rams** Offense must go more vertical, and a choice wideout would help.
- 15 Miami Dolphins** No sure thing that they go for a running back in first round.
- 16 Jacksonville Jaguars** If they are looking for immediate help, could take safety early.
- 17 Oakland Raiders** Can't find Asomugha's replacement until second round.
- 18 San Diego Chargers** Pick from Jets in Cromartie trade is now a second-rounder.
- 19 New York Giants** When was the last big play made by one of their linebackers? 2009?
- 20 Tampa Bay Buccaneers** Need to find playmaker at linebacker.
- 21 Kansas City Chiefs** Nose tackle a good place to start on defense.
- 22 Indianapolis Colts** Offensive line still needs work. Just ask Bill Polian.
- 23 Philadelphia Eagles** Starting right cornerback job will be open.
- 24 New Orleans Saints** Another aggressive young linebacker would do wonders.
- 25 Seattle Seahawks*** Marshawn Lynch ran like he heard RB draft rumors.
- 26 Green Bay Packers*** Would like to find OLT Chad Clifton's eventual replacement.
- 27 Chicago Bears*** Would be little shock if they look for a left tackle in Round One.
- 28 New York Jets*** Few young pass rushers on the roster.
- 29 Baltimore Ravens*** Cornerback remains a position they'd like to upgrade.
- 30 Pittsburgh Steelers*** At some point they'll have to find Hines Ward's replacement.
- 31 Atlanta Falcons*** Have been stockpiling pieces on defense; no reason to stop now.
- 32 New England Patriots*** Will have Raiders' first-rounder, too, to beef up defense.

AP (HARBAUGH)/GETTY IMAGES (CARROLL)

WHISPERS

■ Dolphins NT **Paul Soliai** picked a good year to have his most productive season, as he will be a free agent. He was not expected to start in 2010, but injuries to **Jared Odrick** and **Phillip Merling** forced some shuffling and Soliai started 14 games, recording eight tackles for loss — the most out of any defensive lineman on the team. With Merling possibly moving to the nose next season and Odrick returning healthy, Soliai may have to fight for his starting spot. One team observer called Soliai a “beast” this season for the 'Fins, and they may want to hold on to him.

■ Even if the Bills decide to keep **Ryan Fitzpatrick** as their starter, expect the team to be in the market for a quarterback this offseason. Backup **Brian Brohm** never progressed the way the team was hoping, and he struggled mightily in his only game action of the year, throwing three interceptions against the Jets' backups in Week 17. **Levi Brown**, a rookie in 2010, is still considered a long-term project and is unlikely to be the team's No. 2 QB next season.

■ Jets QB **Mark Sanchez** has had an up-and-down season in 2010, but he said that going through a wide range of experiences has made him and his teammates much more comfortable in rough situations. “Once you get that experience, it's just one other situation you've done,” Sanchez said. “We're definitely in a good place as an offense. We know how to handle it.”

THE WAY WE HEAR IT

AFC EAST

By Eli Kaberon and Kevin Fishbain



Criticized for much of the year, Jets RB Joe McKnight showed in Week 17 that he has a bright future.


BUFFALO BILLS

OLB **Shawne Merriman's** two-year contract extension with the Bills, which was signed on Jan. 3, left our daily team observer “stunned.” Merriman was claimed off waivers from San Diego by Buffalo on Nov. 3, but was placed on I.R. before ever playing a down with the team because of calf and Achilles injuries. It was the fourth season in a row that Merriman has been slowed by injury, as foot and knee problems have limited his productivity the past few seasons, a reason he has a total of four sacks since the start of 2008. Those types of injuries tend to linger and often-times can become worse with age, a reason the two-year contract was so surprising. Outside linebacker is a huge need for the Bills in their 3-4 defense, as the team registered just seven sacks from the position last year. The Merriman extension has the looks of a desperate attempt to salvage something out of the former All-Pro player.


NEW YORK JETS

Considering the success that two Jets castoff RBs had this season — **Danny Woodhead** with the Patriots and **Leon Washington** with the Seahawks — it was easy to knock the organization for choosing rookie **Joe McKnight** as its third-string runner. But McKnight showed in Week 17 that he has the ability to be a productive player in the league. The fourth-round choice from USC rushed for 158 yards against the Bills, highlighting the shiftiness and speed that made him the top high school recruit in the country in 2007. He also has been a valuable member of the Jets' special-teams coverage units. Starting RB **LaDainian Tomlinson** said he saw from the sideline in the Buffalo game that McKnight has the tools needed to be a successful NFL runner. “I think he showed he can definitely be a player in this league,” Tomlinson told PFW. “He's got to continue to perfect his craft, work hard and he has a bright future.”


NEW ENGLAND PATRIOTS

During their bye week, the Patriots re-signed **Marques Murrell**, making him the fourth outside backer the Pats have signed since they cut Murrell on Sept. 13. **Shawn Crable** spent almost two months on the active roster, only to be replaced by **Pierre Woods**, who was then replaced by **Eric Moore**. Crable, Woods and Moore entered games as sub rushers off the edge, and they combined for 3½ sacks. Murrell's sack in the first preseason game against the Saints made people think he could challenge in the open competition at OLB, but he was cut after the season opener. The Patriots then had to deal with a very thin D-line after placing **Ron Brace** and **Mike Wright** on injured reserve. They signed and then released **Atiyah Ellison** as they activated rookie DE **Brandon Deaderick** from a team-imposed suspension. We hear Deaderick was suspended for being late to meetings. He has two sacks this season.


MIAMI DOLPHINS

While the quarterback position is very much in limbo for the Dolphins, the rest of the backfield is just as much of a mystery. Both **Ronnie Brown** and **Ricky Williams** will be free agents, and neither backups **Lex Hilliard** nor **Patrick Cobbs** are starter material. Both Brown and Williams have reason to go elsewhere in 2011, but one was more vocal about leaving than the other.

Brown rushed for just 734 yards, 16 shy of what he needed for a \$500,000 bonus. At age 29, he could ask for more money than the hometown discount the Dolphins would provide for the injury-plagued veteran. This is only the second time in his career that he played in every game, and he has been more open than Williams about staying in South Beach.

“I've established myself here. I'm comfortable here. I've been welcomed by the community,” Brown told reporters after the season finale, but he did leave the door open to explore options.

We had heard during the season that Williams would be the one to take the hometown discount, a one-year deal to conclude his bizarre, yet productive career. But Williams sounded off on Miami radio last week about head coach **Tony Sparano** and the organization.

“It seems like now is time to move on,” Williams said. “I was drafted in 1999, and this is the first time I've been a free agent. I'm excited to see what happens.”

Williams, who had 159 carries this season, the lowest of his career (ignoring 2007 when he played in one game), was not pleased about his role, saying, “this whole season I haven't taken one Advil.”

It also won't be easy for Sparano if Williams sticks around. Williams said playing under Sparano is “not a great fit for me.”

So with Williams likely out of the picture, the Dolphins may be more willing to keep Brown in Miami. That said, they will still want to go after a running back in April's draft. At the 15th pick, Alabama's Heisman Trophy winner **Mark Ingram** could be available. It is not a RB-heavy draft, and Ingram is considered to be tops at the position.

The offense will undergo a lot of changes in the next few months, as it brings in a new coordinator. There also could be a whole new backfield in Miami in 2011.

WHISPERS

■ In a recent interview with PFW, Ravens secondary coach **Chuck Pagano** said SS **Dawan Landry's** reliability is a defining trait. "He just shows up every Sunday ready to play," Pagano said, calling Landry "very steady." Landry started all 16 games in the regular season, notching a career-high 108 tackles. Landry had four tackles, including two for loss, and an interception in the wild-card win over the Chiefs. Pagano noted that the 6-foot, 210-pound Landry has played well close to the line of scrimmage and has been a "solid tackler."

■ On the matter of whether a defensive-oriented coach would have to win him over in the interview process and whether he preferred an offensive expert as coach, Browns president **Mike Holmgren** made it clear he was open to candidates with both offensive and defensive backgrounds. "I don't want to be painted into a corner on that; I really don't," he said. "I think that there is an attractive part to both. We lost a lot of close games, a lot of low-scoring, close games, so I would like to put a little bit more pizzazz, but that's not necessarily really the head coach. That's the staff, that's the players we give him and all of those things." The Browns' last three full-time head coaches — **Eric Mangini**, **Romeo Crennel** and **Butch Davis** — all attained success as defensive coaches before becoming head coaches.

THE WAY WE HEAR IT

AFC NORTH

By Mike Wilkening



Rookie DE Ziggy Hood has been a valuable member of the Steelers' defense, filling in for Aaron Smith.



BALTIMORE RAVENS

In the last three games of the regular season, Ravens WR **Anquan Boldin** was targeted just nine times as Baltimore emphasized the running game and opponents did a nice job taking him away. In Sunday's wild-card win at Kansas City, however, Boldin was a much bigger factor, catching five passes for 64 yards and a touchdown. He was targeted seven times, most among Baltimore's wideouts. Boldin, so adept at working over the middle, came wide open as the Chiefs blitzed early in the first quarter, racking up 27 yards and setting up a Baltimore field goal. On his touchdown, Boldin ran a slant pattern and made a leaping catch of a **Joe Flacco** pass. The Ravens had repeated success attacking with short passes, with TE **Todd Heap** Flacco's primary target. Of the 13 passes thrown his way, Heap caught 10 for 108 yards, both career playoff-highs for one of Baltimore's stalwarts.



CLEVELAND BROWNS

Browns president **Mike Holmgren** indicated QB **Colt McCoy's** development is a factor to be considered in the club's process to find a replacement for **Eric Mangini**. Holmgren said he "certainly" saw McCoy having the ability to be a long-term option at the position. "Who the head coach is, who the offensive coordinator is, who his position coach is — they're important for any team," Holmgren said. "But if all of a sudden you have the quarterback you think can be the quarterback, a young man who can be the quarterback for the next 10-15 years hopefully, it becomes even more important." McCoy captured the starting job after beginning the season as the No. 3 quarterback. The Browns have interviewed Rams offensive coordinator **Pat Shurmur** and Falcons offensive coordinator **Mike Mularkey**. The Browns are also reportedly slated to interview Giants defensive coordinator **Perry Fewell**.



PITTSBURGH STEELERS

One of the Steelers' distinguishing traits this season has been the contributions they have received from throughout the roster. On offense, the Steelers were able to persevere without QB **Ben Roethlisberger** in the first quarter of the season, with **Dennis Dixon** and **Charlie Batch** stepping up. Rookie **Emmanuel Sanders**, who has become the No. 3 receiver, has shown marked improvement as the season has gone on, with fellow rookie WR **Antonio Brown** making the most of his limited opportunities, too. Reserve RB **Isaac Redman**, meanwhile, keyed the pivotal win at Baltimore in Week 13 with an impressive TD catch. On defense, DE **Ziggy Hood** has filled in admirably for injured DE **Aaron Smith**, with reserve DE **Nick Eason** and NT **Chris Hoke** also reliable contributors to a defensive line that has helped the Steelers shut down opposing running games all year.



CINCINNATI BENGALS

With **Marvin Lewis** coming back for a franchise-record ninth season, what will be different about Cincinnati?

That remains to be seen. Changes could come to the coaching staff, president **Mike Brown** said at a press conference on Jan. 4, noting that he and Lewis agreed that "things have to be done differently." There has been relatively little turnover on Lewis' coaching staff throughout his tenure in Cincinnati.

On the subject of the roster, both Brown and Lewis indicated that they liked what they saw from some of the young players who got a chance to play later in the season.

"We'll be a little different team," Brown said. "We were a little different at the end this year, and we have some good young guys, guys that showed very well. Our two defensive ends (**Carlos Dunlap** and **Michael Johnson**) looked to be real keepers in this league, and so do our two young wideouts (**Andre Caldwell** and **Jerome Simpson**). "... We were doing some good things. It's overshadowed because of the (4-12) record, but we see it and we know it. We know what it means for the future."

At some point, that future will include a new starting quarterback, but not for 2011, with Lewis telling ESPN Radio that **Carson Palmer** will keep the job next season. Whom Palmer will throw to is an issue to watch. WR **Terrell Owens** is a free agent and seems unlikely to be back. The Bengals reportedly do have **Chad Ochocinco** under contract for 2011, according to multiple media outlets.

Lewis' contract extension with Cincinnati, reportedly for two years, came after discussions with Brown about each man's vision for the club. Lewis didn't elaborate on whether he had earned concessions from Brown on any issues. "I'm very satisfied about where we are, and that's all I'll say to it," Lewis said. "I wouldn't be sitting here if I wasn't satisfied with where we are moving forward."

Major alterations in how the Bengals conduct their football business don't appear to be in the offing. Brown defended the team's draft record and the size of its personnel department, which has only seven members. Also, Lewis said Brown would continue to have final say on football decisions, though both spoke of a collaborative decision-making process.

WHISPERS

■ Texans head coach **Gary Kubiak** believes the club's decision whether to re-sign TE **Owen Daniels**, a free-agent-to-be who played very well at the end of the season after being bothered by knee and hamstring injuries for the majority of the campaign, isn't much of one at all. "It's easy for me," Kubiak told reporters after the Texans' season finale. "I told you guys the last few weeks, he's back. It's been a hard battle, though. He probably came back too quick from his knee, and then it caused him problems with his hamstring. ... Over the course of the past four weeks, he's shown he's fine, he's back, and he'll be a Pro Bowl player. We need him on this football team. He is a hell of a player, he's a great kid and we kind of go as he goes. I hope he's here for a long, long time."

■ It might be getting to the point in his career where the Jaguars consider moving CB **Rashean Mathis** to safety. Mathis' coverage skills are not what they used to be, and safety is the club's biggest need. The Jaguars do not have two starting caliber CBs, however, so that is a position they would also need to address.

■ Colts second-year CB **Jacob Lacey** is the defensive version of **Pierre Garcon**. Lacey has an abundance of physical gifts, but his consistency has been an issue. The Jets targeted Lacey, who has a tendency to sit on routes, on several occasions in the wild-card loss. The biggest play came on a key 18-yard first down conversion to WR **Braylon Edwards** with only 29 seconds remaining that set up PK **Nick Folk**'s 32-yard game-winning field goal.

THE WAY WE HEAR IT

AFC SOUTH

By Mike Wilkening and Arthur Arkush



SPORTSPICS

PK Adam Vinatieri is a pending free agent, but he would like to end his career in Indianapolis.


INDIANAPOLIS COLTS

After being sidelined for the final 10 games of the 2009 season and the playoffs with a knee injury, 38-year-old PK **Adam Vinatieri** was determined this season to prove that neither age nor injury would prevent him from still being effective. He did just that, converting 92.9 percent (26-of-28) of his field-goal attempts in the regular season — the second-highest percentage of his 15-year career. Vinatieri, an unrestricted free agent after the season who has expressed a desire to finish his career with the Colts, has impressed team observers not just with his accuracy, but also the distance that he is converting from — Vinatieri drilled a 50-yard FG in the final minute of the wild-card loss to the Jets. While he does not possess the range he once did and no longer kicks off, deferring to P **Pat McAfee** for that role, we're told the Colts will make every effort to reward Vinatieri's effort this season by negotiating a new deal.


JACKSONVILLE JAGUARS

Although the Jaguars spent their first four picks in the 2010 draft on defensive linemen and acquired pass-rushing specialist **Aaron Kampman** in free agency, we hear that a defensive end remains at the top of their offseason wish list. The club showed marked improvement in getting to the quarterback by nearly doubling its sack total this season — 26 sacks compared to 14 in 2009 — but it still finished the season ranked 28th in both sack percentage and pass defense. The Jaguars think Kampman, who was playing at a high level before suffering his second consecutive season-ending knee injury, can make a full recovery, but it is imperative that they find a player who can attract double-teams and consistently wreak havoc on QBs to pair with him on the left side. The way we hear it, rookie DE **Austen Lane** and DE **Jeremy Mincey** played well in spurts in '10, but neither appears to be the difference maker the club covets.


HOUSTON TEXANS

With the Texans hiring **Wade Phillips** to fix one of the NFL's worst defenses, the focus turns to who will execute his defense. The Texans have the No. 11 overall pick in April's draft, and it is rather likely that they will be seeking a defender in Round One, the way we hear it. What's more, the Texans have employed a 4-3 base defense for the last five seasons and will be moving to a 3-4 front with Phillips, a standout defensive coordinator at multiple NFL stops, in charge. How Phillips will use the personnel already on hand remains to be seen. The Texans' top three players in the front seven — SLB **Brian Cushing**, MLB **DeMeco Ryans** and DE **Mario Williams** — would all seem to have skills that would translate to any system. Already Phillips has told *The Houston Chronicle* that Williams can be a "dominant" player. DE **Antonio Smith** also has experience in the 3-4 and seems a logical fit in the Texans' system, too.


TENNESSEE TITANS

The Titans could have a drastically different look at quarterback next season.

They have already committed to trade or release QB **Vince Young**, whom they drafted No. 3 overall five years ago. **Kerry Collins**, who has made 32 starts for Tennessee in the last five seasons and will be 39 next December, is slated to be a free agent. Beyond that, the Titans have 30-year-old **Chris Simms**, whom they signed in November when Young suffered a season-ending thumb injury and is slated to be a free agent; and rookie QB **Rusty Smith**, a developmental prospect who has a long way to go to be an NFL regular. Collins, who still has a strong arm and played well at points late in the season, could be back as a reserve, the way we hear it.

With the No. 8 pick in the NFL draft, the Titans are potentially positioned to be players for one of the top passing prospects in a strong draft class, with Washington's **Jake Locker** the top senior prospect and Missouri's **Blaine Gabbert** and Arkansas' **Ryan Mallett** among the top underclassmen who had declared as of this writing. The way we hear it, drafting a passer seems a likely route for Tennessee to take.

Finding a standout, long-term solution in free agency could be easier said than done, as it is very rare for a blue-chip passer to ever hit the open market. (For instance, it's extremely unlikely that Colts QB **Peyton Manning** or Eagles QB **Michael Vick**, whose deals expire after the season, will become available.) What's more, the uncertainty about an extension to the Collective Bargaining Agreement between owners and players complicates matters, too.

Young passers with some upside whose contracts expire include Pittsburgh's **Dennis Dixon** (three years of service), Minnesota's **Tarvaris Jackson** (five), Houston's **Matt Leinart** (five), San Francisco's **Alex Smith** (six), Detroit's **Drew Stanton** (four) and Miami's **Tyler Thigpen** (four). Among more experienced passers slated to become free agents, Baltimore's **Marc Bulger** could top the list.

In the trade market, Philadelphia's **Kevin Kolb** could be a top target, though the Eagles would seem likely to ask for a king's ransom in return.

What is clear about the Titans' QB situation, however, is that Young is no longer in the picture.

WHISPERS

■ With their special teams finishing 2010 as one of the worst groups ever, the Chargers had little choice but to part ways with special-teams coach **Steve Crosby**. San Diego allowed three kickoff returns for TDs, had four punts blocked and gave up 18.9 yards per punt return. Although Crosby had been on staff since 2002 and was a favorite of head coach **Norv Turner's**, somebody had to take the fall for the unit failing in nearly all areas. Improving the special teams will be a key for the Bolts this offseason.

■ Some wondered if P **Shane Lechler** would be sent packing after he publicly bashed the Raiders for not picking up the option on head coach **Tom Cable's** contract. Oakland signed P **Glenn Pakulak** after Lechler sounded off, but word is the signing was not a signal that Oakland was ready to part ways with Lechler, who is arguably the best punter in the league.

■ While interim head coach **Eric Studesville** is not expected to retain the Broncos' head-coaching position, we hear there is a very good chance he will have a role with the team moving forward. The coach has been highly praised at all levels of the organization since taking over for **Josh McDaniels** with four weeks remaining in the season, and he has been said to carry a lot of class. With the future of all Broncos assistant coaches in jeopardy until a new head coach is hired, a source close to the team said Studesville has the best shot at being retained.

THE WAY WE HEAR IT

AFC WEST

By Dan Parr, Michael Blunda and Alex Mayster



Chargers OLB Larry English has failed to make a big impact as a pass rusher in his two pro seasons.



DENVER BRONCOS

The way we hear it, the timing of executive vice president of football operations **John Elway's** hiring works out well for the Broncos. Denver missed the playoffs for the fifth consecutive season in 2010, the longest drought since the team's first postseason appearance in 1977, and the fans were beginning to lose trust in the organization. They wanted an organizational leader who would bring the Broncos back to the glory days when the team won back-to-back Super Bowls with Elway under center, and who better to do that than Elway himself? We hear he already has the support of the players, who respect what he did as a player and realize he can't do anything but help the organization. While Elway might not have experience running an NFL team, he was the Arena Football League's Executive of the Year in 2003. Also, he readily admits he is aware of his weaknesses and will make hires to fill those voids.



KANSAS CITY CHIEFS

While offensive coordinator **Charlie Weis** and head coach **Todd Haley** weren't at each other's throats in Kansas City, we hear that their relationship did have something to do with Weis deciding to leave for the University of Florida. The two butted heads during this past season, as the offensive-minded coaches each wanted to have a hand in the direction of the unit. We're told that by the end of the year, Haley was actually calling about 15 plays per game, which didn't sit well with Weis. Although Weis did help the offense take a big step forward in 2010, he is not viewed as irreplaceable, we hear. The Chiefs even have a couple of candidates on staff in assistant head coach **Maurice Carthon** and offensive quality-control coach **Nick Sirianni**, who has worked closely with QB **Matt Cassel**. If Haley promotes either of them, however, it could be a sign that he does not want to concede too much power this time around.



OAKLAND RAIDERS

Raiders managing general partner **Al Davis** is expected to interview offensive coordinator **Hue Jackson** for the team's head-coaching vacancy, but Davis apparently is not going to be pressured into speeding up the hiring process for the supposed front-runner. Davis spent time evaluating Oakland's assistant coaches over the weekend after the 49ers did not make an offer to Jackson, who interviewed for their head-coaching position last week before they ended up hiring **Jim Harbaugh**. Jackson handled play-calling duties last season, which was his first with the Raiders, and they improved from 31st to sixth in points per game, scoring 213 more points in '10. In addition, there was speculation throughout the season that he would replace **Tom Cable** if Davis decided not to pick up Cable's option. Cable was informed that his time as head coach had come to an end on Jan. 4.



SAN DIEGO CHARGERS

If a team finishes ranked No. 1 in both total offense and total defense, as the Chargers did in 2010, it would appear not to have many holes. But when that same team ends the campaign with a 9-7 record, it's clear that upgrades need to be made.

Coming off one of the strangest seasons in recent memory, the Bolts enter the offseason with more questions than answers. They know their special teams was one of the worst in league history, which is why they immediately fired coach **Steve Crosby**. They also were severely hampered by injuries, tying a record by using 74 different players in a non-strike season. And they are convinced that **Norv Turner** remains the right choice as head coach. So what is it that they need to address?

While the Chargers finished second in QB sack percentage, we hear that improving their pass rush is essential. That makes their top priority in the draft finding an impact outside linebacker. **Shaun Phillips** was a beast this season, notching 11 sacks, but San Diego did not have another OLB who could consistently put pressure on opposing passers. That's because the guy they expected to fill that role, **Larry English**, has not panned out.

A first-round pick in the 2009 draft, English has been a major disappointment. The team had hoped he could be the replacement for **Shawne Merriman**, but he has done little to show that he can be an NFL starter. Injuries limited him to eight games in '10 with just two starts, and he did not make a difference when he was on the field. With only five sacks in two campaigns, the Northern Illinois product has proven to be a mid-major-school standout who is too slow and undersized to be a stellar pro. The Chargers need to find an outside 'backer who can put heat on the QB and help free up Phillips.

The Bolts also will be looking to upgrade the DE position, where **Jacques Cesaire's** play has begun to fall off. He has just 2½ sacks the past two seasons and is no longer a pass-rushing force. Finding someone to replace the 30-year-old in the starting lineup could be something San Diego does on Draft Day. Of course, if defensive coordinator **Ron Rivera** leaves to take a head-coaching job, the unit will take a hit regardless.

WHISPERS

■ The Eagles must get better along the defensive front, and at least one of their top four tackles might not return. **Brodrick Bunkley** took a step back this season, and **Mike Patterson** was serviceable but not special. The Eagles like **Antonio Dixon** and **Trevor Laws**, but they might be better-served as rotational players, not starters.

■ Because of labor uncertainty, the Giants will wait before trying to re-sign some of their own free agents, including WR **Steve Smith**, DT **Barry Cofield** and RB **Ahmad Bradshaw**. But Giants GM **Jerry Reese** hinted that the team might offer **Mathias Kiwanuka**, who is rehabbing from a serious neck injury, only a one-year deal as a form of incentive to return to form. We hear other teams would be interested in maybe giving Kiwanuka a better offer.

■ Cowboys QB **Stephen McGee** likely showed enough to get another chance to make the team in 2011. If it hadn't been for the strong play of **Jon Kitna** ahead of him, McGee might have even pushed him for a shot at the backup spot. But the pecking order should remain the same — **Tony Romo**, Kitna, then McGee.

■ The Redskins were perhaps indirectly hurt by the decision of Stanford QB **Andrew Luck** to stay in school another year. Owning the 10th pick meant the Redskins would have had to trade way up to have had any chance at Luck, but now it just means that one fewer QB will be in the draft pool and might shift up, by one slot, the player they would be considering. The team certainly will eye a quarterback at that spot, but it's possible they might have to trade up to get the QB they want.

THE WAY WE HEAR IT

NFC EAST

By Eric Edholm



BRUCE L. SCHWARTZMAN

The Giants have thrown their support behind head coach Tom Coughlin, who had words for his critics.


NEW YORK GIANTS

Some fans were upset with the decision to retain head coach **Tom Coughlin**, but the issue apparently was never in question. Coughlin led the Giants to 10 wins, tied for fourth-most in the NFC, and did so despite 42 turnovers. Can you blame a coach for turnovers? Not directly, no. And the Giants were not close to doing so because they believe that Coughlin did a good job this season and that they couldn't find a better available coach to replace him. It's another sign that the Giants are a team of great stability, starting with ownership. And it perhaps showed a strong sign of support when it allowed an NFL Films video of Coughlin saying critics can "kiss my ass" in the wake of a Week 17 locker-room celebration. The typically conservative team could have stepped in and vetoed this footage, but they apparently allowed Coughlin to speak his mind as a sign of their backing for the coach.


WASHINGTON REDSKINS

It was a rough first season for **Mike Shanahan** in Washington, but there were plenty of signs that his offensive system can work with the Redskins. At receiver, **Santana Moss** had arguably his best season as a Redskin at age 31, and **Anthony Armstrong** came out of nowhere to put up 871 receiving yards. TE **Chris Cooley** tied his career high in receiving yards. RB **Ryan Torain** showed signs he could be a No. 1 back if he can stay healthy. And all this with QB issues and very spotty blocking up front. Quarterback clearly is the most concerning position heading into the offseason, but the line also is one area that is sure to see a lot of changes. OLT **Trent Williams**, despite being a little up and down, has shown he can be an anchor along the Redskins' front. But there could be new starters at perhaps three positions up front, with both OG spots being the most likely spots to change.


PHILADELPHIA EAGLES

Eagles RCB **Dimitri Patterson** went from feel-good story to man under the microscope. That's because the safety-turned-cornerback struggled in a starting role late in the season, becoming the Eagles defensive back whom opponents most often chose to target. Why go after **Asante Samuel** and his seven regular-season interceptions, or even nickel CB **Joselio Hanson**, when Patterson struggled to stop passes thrown his way with any kind of consistency? He's a high-effort player with some tackling strength, and he did a pretty good job of keeping most of the receptions he has allowed to remain in front of him. But it became a constant concern, and opponents took notice of his relative struggles. The Eagles will go into the offseason knowing they'll need help at this position, especially given that **Ellis Hobbs**, whom Patterson replaced, is rehabbing a potentially career-threatening neck injury.


DALLAS COWBOYS

One of the more interesting elements of the introductory press conference of Cowboys head coach **Jason Garrett** was the power that owner **Jerry Jones** apparently will grant him.

One element of that power is the hiring and firing of assistant coaches. The team has some decisions to make as to how to fill out the coaching staff, the most important of which likely will be defensive coordinator, since Garrett will be calling plays on offense.

Jones mentioned that **Todd Bowles**, a former Cowboys assistant during the **Bill Parcells** regime who interviewed for the head-coaching vacancy this time around, had an excellent interview. So much so that the Cowboys might want him to run the defense. Currently, Bowles remains on the Dolphins' staff, and head coach **Tony Sparano** was retained as head coach there. That could delay Bowles becoming a legitimate candidate for the coordinator job in Dallas. The Cowboys want him, and Jones didn't appear to hide it.

OL coach **Hudson Houck** and special-teams coordinator **Joe DeCamillis** both have contracts running through the next few seasons and are expected to return. WR coach **Ray Sherman** was a team favorite and was expected to be back, too, but he will not. It's the first time we have seen what appears to be Garrett exercising his new power of making calls on the coaching staff. Jones clearly held Sherman in high regard, having him interview for Garrett's job, but Garrett must not have shared that view.

But Jones also added an important element to Garrett's power when he said, "There won't be a player on the team that Jason doesn't want on the team." In essence, Garrett would have final say — or as close to it as Jones will allow — over the 53-man roster and could have increased say in major free-agent and draft decisions.

Wade Phillips, whom Garrett replaced, simply did not possess that degree of authority over either the coaching staff, which Jones picked in 2007, or the players. It's an interesting development in the organization, as Jones typically has maintained major control in these departments. It could show an increased level of trust in Garrett, who has scouting roots, although Jones could reassume that authority down the road.

WHISPERS

■ Our Packers sources tell us SS **Atari Bigby** could be nearing the end of the road in Green Bay after having a problem staying on the field this season due to ankle, hamstring and groin injuries. With rookie **Morgan Burnett**, who had won the starting SS job in training camp before going on I.R., expected to regain the starting job next season, the consensus seems to be that Bigby might be better off with a change of scenery.

■ There's growing sense in Minnesota that free-agent LB **Chad Greenway** remains the Vikings' top priority this offseason, especially if fourth-year players such as **Sidney Rice** are not unrestricted free agents under a new Collective Bargaining Agreement. But it's also no guarantee that Greenway returns. One team that could go hard after him would be the division-rival Lions, who would be an attractive option with such a strong defensive front and a big need at **Julian Peterson's** soon-to-be-vacated spot.

■ The Bears have consistently referred to their Week 17 loss to the Packers as a good learning experience, and C **Olin Kreutz** said the game was particularly valuable to the offensive line, which allowed QB **Jay Cutler** to be sacked six times and had trouble communicating because of a raucous Lambeau Field crowd. "It starts with me," Kreutz said. "I have to communicate all my calls so everybody knows who they have. I learned a lot on how to communicate to certain guys, so we can take a lot from that game."

THE WAY WE HEAR IT

NFC NORTH

By Dan Arkush, Eric Edholm and Dan Parr



Erik Walden is part of a Green Bay linebacking corps that appears to be extremely deep.



DETROIT LIONS

Entering last season there was little question: Cornerback was, by far, the team's biggest need. It remains a need but a far less concerning one. Whereas last season the team needed to add its top three corners, it appears that two of those spots are solidified. LCB **Chris Houston** has established himself as the team's top corner, another excellent pickup by GM **Martin Mayhew**. **Alphonso Smith** got off to a great start this season, intercepting five passes, but he struggled to defend the deep ball and finished on a bit of a down note. Smith remains a part of the defense's future, but where he ends up remains to be seen. He was the starting right corner most of the season, but his best spot might be the nickel. Although linebacker remains the top need this offseason, it would not surprise team observers if the Lions consider a cornerback with their first overall draft pick at No. 13.



MINNESOTA VIKINGS

The news that **Leslie Frazier** was scheduled to interview **Josh McDaniels** and **Mike Singletary** to possibly join the Vikings' coaching staff is a sign of great security by a first-year head coach. Surely, the Vikings have taken notice of the Bears' success this season, winning the division with four one-time head coaches on staff. But the difference in Minnesota is that Frazier has only six games of interim head-coaching experience under his belt. The fact that Frazier wants to surround himself with experienced coaches is a sign of maturity, too, as the Vikings likely will be going through a transition next season. It also shows Frazier wants to change directions offensively, away from the West Coast system and, if they go with McDaniels, more of a spread attack. That almost certainly would signal a change in the type of QB they go after and would make retaining WR **Sidney Rice** even more of a priority, perhaps.



CHICAGO BEARS

While the Bears did more than just get by with an unremarkable collection of players at defensive tackle in 2010, there could be some significant personnel changes made at the position. Some expect DT **Tommie Harris**, who hasn't regained his Pro Bowl form, to be released before he's due a bonus in June, and NT **Anthony Adams**, who started every game this season, is set to become an unrestricted free agent. We hear the Bears are interested in signing Adams to a contract extension, but the two sides haven't been able to come to an agreement, and Adams may be inclined to explore the market in free agency. DT **Matt Toeaina**, who was due to become a free agent before signing an extension last month, will be back in 2011, and **Marcus Harrison** and DL **Henry Melton**, who has played end and tackle, can help in the rotation, but the position figures to be a priority for the Bears in the draft.



GREEN BAY PACKERS

Just what the Packers needed: another balls-to-the-wall, big-play linebacker.

Don't look now, but hot on the heels of an eye-opening performance in Green Bay's playoff-clinching victory over the Bears by street pickup **Erik Walden** (two sacks and a Packers 2010 single-game high of 16 tackles, per coaches' film review), the Packers appear to have an embarrassment of riches at the LB position.

Both inside and outside.

Inside, team insiders were not too surprised when the Packers' powers-that-be decided to make fourth-year pro **Desmond Bishop** a lot richer a few days after the victory over Chicago when they signed him to a four-year, \$19 million contract extension.

Bishop's new deal culminated a whirlwind turn of events, considering that he seriously thought about asking for a trade before the season because he felt he had no future stuck behind starting ILBs **Nick Barnett** and **A.J. Hawk**.

But when Barnett went down for the count in Week Four with a season-ending wrist injury, Bishop wasted no time at all excelling in Barnett's place.

After he finished the regular season with 121 tackles (second-most on the team behind Hawk, per coaches' review), three sacks and an interception returned for a touchdown, GM **Ted Thompson** assured Bishop of likely starting status for a long time to come, signing him to a deal that averages the same \$4.75 million as the four-year deal that fellow ILB **Brandon Chillar** signed late last season.

Can the Packers realistically hold on to four pretty high-priced inside 'backers in Bishop, Chillar, Barnett and Hawk after this season?

The way we hear it, the odds are growing that either Barnett or Hawk, who has one year left on his contract at \$10 million, will be regretfully sent packing.

At outside linebacker, meanwhile, it all of a sudden seems like a major logjam has developed at the spot opposite Pro Bowler **Clay Matthews** involving **Brad Jones**, who suffered a season-ending injury in Week Seven and was put on I.R.; undrafted rookie **Frank Zombo**, who was doing a nice job replacing Jones before hurting his knee; and Walden, who did an unbelievable job replacing Zombo in the Packers' win over the Bears in Week 17.

WHISPERS

■ **RB Pierre Thomas** was placed on injured reserve Jan. 5 after aggravating an ankle injury in practice leading up to Week 17. It was the same ankle injury that sidelined him for more than half of the season. He's due to become a free agent this offseason, and while the Saints have interest in re-signing him, we hear they're not prepared to go all out to bring him back if another team makes a high bid on Thomas.

■ One Buccaneers assistant coach who will undergo a particularly thorough review this offseason is **Todd Wash**, who just completed his first season as the team's defensive line coach. He coached the defensive ends in '09. The Bucs invested their top two draft picks in defensive tackles in 2010, and it's expected that they'll spend at least one early pick on a defensive end this year. Wash's contract is set to expire early this offseason, and he won't be re-signed if the Bucs have any doubts about his ability to develop the young talent they're collecting up front on "D."

■ Falcons director of player personnel **Les Snead** reportedly interviewed with the 49ers for their GM vacancy before they hired **Trent Baalke**, and while Snead may not get an opportunity to move up the ranks this year — no other teams were known to be pursuing a general manager as of this writing — he could draw serious consideration for a promotion to a GM position in the near future. Snead received an endorsement from Falcons GM **Thomas Dimitroff**. "(Snead is) going to have opportunities," Dimitroff told PFW. "He's a very adept personnel man."

THE WAY WE HEAR IT

NFC SOUTH

By Dan Parr



The Buccaneers are interested in re-signing MLB Barrett Ruud, but only at the right price.



CAROLINA PANTHERS

It was no secret that the Panthers were planning on using the first overall pick in the draft to select a potential franchise quarterback before Stanford's **Andrew Luck** announced last week that he would return to college for his senior season. Luck's surprising decision disappointed Panthers fans, and a new consensus No. 1 pick might not emerge from the remaining field of elite prospects entering the draft. While Carolina is getting closer to hiring a replacement at head coach for **John Fox**, there has been plenty of speculation as to who will rise to replace Luck atop the Panthers' draft board. Clemson DE **Da'Quan Bowers**, who led the nation in sacks in 2010 (15½), is one of the favorites. He's considered the best defensive end available and picking him would fill a need for the Panthers. Their best defensive end, **Charles Johnson**, is due to become a free agent this offseason.



NEW ORLEANS SAINTS

While he's drawn interest from at least one team with a head-coaching vacancy, Saints defensive coordinator **Gregg Williams** recently reiterated that he's not prepared to leave his current position for just any head-coaching job. Newly minted Broncos executive **John Elway** has said he's interested in interviewing Williams for Denver's head-coaching job, and he's free to meet with Broncos officials now that the Saints have been eliminated from the playoffs. Saints captain and MLB **Jonathan Vilma** told PFW earlier this season that he'd hate to see Williams leave New Orleans, but he also said that Williams deserved another chance to be a head coach. Williams was the Bills' head coach from 2001-03. Williams said he had "eight different opportunities" to leave when he was the Redskins' D-coordinator from 2004-07 but didn't, and he was adamant that his focus was on the Saints prior to the wild-card game in Seattle.



TAMPA BAY BUCCANEERS

Barrett Ruud led the Bucs in tackles for a fourth consecutive season and he's provided steady leadership in the linebacking corps, especially since **Derrick Brooks** departed after the 2008 season. While a segment of Bucs fans have questioned his toughness, the team has no doubts about whether he's tough enough, but it's not a lock that the Bucs will re-sign him when he becomes a free agent this offseason, we hear. The Bucs were unwilling to commit to him long-term when he was a restricted free agent last offseason, much to Ruud's dismay, and they are not expected to get involved in a bidding war for him if another team is willing to pay a premium for his services. The Bucs would welcome him back at the right price, but Ruud is said to be uninterested in taking less to stay. Tampa Bay may have to look outside for help at the position, as there is no clear replacement for him on the roster.



ATLANTA FALCONS

After clinching the No. 1 seed in the NFC playoffs, head coach **Mike Smith** was not short on good options to choose from when PFW asked him whom he considered to be the team's MVP of the regular season.

He narrowed it down to a split vote between two players without much hesitation.

"For the regular season this year, I would have to say that two guys come to mind," Smith told PFW. "I think (**Matt Ryan**) has had a great year. He's being recognized as a Pro Bowl quarterback. Matt's done a very good job."

Smith admitted that his other choice was a bit more "outside the box."

"Another guy, believe it or not, that's played an integral part is our kicker, **Matt Bryant**."

It was high praise from the head coach of a team that sent a league-high seven players to the Pro Bowl, especially considering the performances of WR **Roddy White**, who led the league in receptions (115), and RB **Michael Turner**, who rushed for an NFC-best 1,371 yards and 12 touchdowns.

Having the peace of mind provided by a reliable placekicker is something Smith clearly doesn't undervalue.

Bryant connected on 28-of-31 field-goal attempts during the regular season and all 44 of his point-after tries. He broke ties with high-pressure field goals late in games on two occasions where the Falcons held on to win, and he also had a game-winning kick in overtime against the Saints in Week Three. While Ryan made his first Pro Bowl, throwing 28 touchdown passes and only nine interceptions, Bryant was named a first alternate to Eagles PK **David Akers**, who made 32-of-38 FG attempts.

"Almost half the ballgames (in the NFL) are (decided by) eight points or less and about 25-30 percent are three points or less," Smith said. "It's important to have somebody that you have confidence in at the end of the ballgame that can kick those game-winning field goals or game-tying field goals."

Bryant was looking for another chance with an NFL team when the Falcons signed him on Dec. 1, 2009. He had been cut by the Buccaneers after losing a training-camp battle to **Mike Nugent** and spent time in the UFL, but has been a nice addition for Atlanta.

WHISPERS

■ With **Tim Tebow's** prospects looking better in Denver, could **Kyle Orton** be a quarterback the Cardinals might consider if he was available? "You never know," said one team insider. "He kind of fills the bill and could be a good bridge for a younger QB. (Ravens backup QB **Marc Bulger** is the name still getting the biggest buzz, though." The insider added that he thought the Eagles would demand too high a price for QB **Kevin Kolb**.

■ Even before **Jim Tomsula** did a terrific job in his one-game stint as interim head coach of the Niners, we hear he had been virtually guaranteed a job with the Niners for a long time to come. "At the very least, he'll remain the D-line coach — but maybe more," said one Niners source. "He will always be close to Jed (Niners owner **Jed York**). He's fun! You need a guy like that."

■ Our Seahawks sources tell us the team is going to sorely miss defensive line coach **Dan Quinn**, who is leaving to become the defensive coordinator at Florida. "Everybody from **Pete Carroll** on down has given him major props for the job he did with such a banged-up line," said one team insider.

■ As it now stands, FS **O.J. Atogwe** is due an \$8 million roster bonus in March that the Rams will have to think long and hard about paying. But Atogwe has made it clear that he would prefer to stay in St. Louis. "I want to be back," Atogwe said. "However we can make it work, we'll talk about it. Going forward, it's just whatever God has for the organization. He's going to let His will be done, and I'm cool with that."

THE WAY WE HEAR IT

NFC WEST

By Dan Arkush



Seahawks WR Mike Williams' contributions in 2010 mean he's going to be counted on in the future.

ARIZONA
CARDINALS

With the exception of quarterback, where a new starter is expected via free agency, trade or the draft, the position that could change the most for the Cardinals is linebacker, where we hear it's possible only one of the four LBs who began the season as a starter (**Paris Lenon**) might return to the team. OLBs **Joey Porter** and **Clark Haggans** are both age 33 (Haggans turns 34 on Jan. 10), and Porter, whose salary will jump to \$5.7 million if he sticks around, was a big disappointment. Inside, veteran **Gerald Hayes** couldn't stay healthy and was ineffective when he was able to play. Rookies **Daryl Washington** and **O'Brien Schofield** had their moments inside and outside, respectively. "But neither of them wowed anybody," one daily team observer said. "There really is a big need for outside pass rushers. Schofield is about the only young guy they've got right now at the position."

ST. LOUIS
RAMS

Disbelief was the major emotion being felt on the streets of St. Louis, when it was revealed a few days after the Rams' disappointing season-ending loss to the Seahawks that offensive coordinator **Pat Shurmur** had been granted an interview for the Browns' vacant head-coaching post. That **Mike Holmgren** might seriously consider Shurmur — despite what was immediately perceived as a totally ineffective game plan against the Seahawks — rose eyebrows to the Gateway Arch's rafters. "You have to wonder. A lot of it is (Holmgren and Shurmur) having the same agent (**Bob LaMonte**), but it definitely got a reaction," said one source on the scene. "Shurmur does deserve heavy blame for a game plan against Seattle that had **Steven Jackson** making only 11 carries. But actually, he hasn't done a bad job. The Rams' 114-point improvement from last year is the second-most in the league."

SAN FRANCISCO
49ERS

With his first full season now in the books, we hear the verdict remains very much out on 49ers 2009 first-round draft pick **Michael Crabtree**. "If you ask management, he's an example of a guy who probably needs to be a centerpiece," a team insider said of the enigmatic wideout. "But he's got to step up. I know (WR coach) **Jerry Sullivan** likes (No. 2 WR) **Josh Morgan** better." There continues to be no doubt about Crabtree's natural ability. "He's got what you call great 'late hands' with his ability to snatch the ball out of mid-air," the insider said. But his attitude and work ethic — his altercation in a walk-through late in the preseason with TE **Vernon Davis**, who accused Crabtree of dogging it, continues to leave a bad taste — are red flags that have been hard to overlook. "He's just a real strange guy," the insider said. "You really have to wonder if he is as motivated as he needs to be."

SEATTLE
SEAHAWKS

Is there a player on the Seahawks considered more important to the team moving forward than **Mike Williams**?

With the team deciding to give him a three-year, \$11.2 million contract extension as a present on his 27th birthday Jan. 3, it certainly seems all of a sudden as though Williams — despite being out of the NFL the previous two seasons — has become the most obvious building block in the foundation that head coach **Pete Carroll** and GM **John Schneider** have been assembling in their first year on the job, mostly on the fly.

"Yeah, it's so weird the way it all came together for him," said one daily team observer. "He just came in for a tryout, not expecting anything. Even he was surprised."

But what became very unsurprising was the constant mismatch Williams provided with his rare size and quickness on the perimeter — a presence so strong that **T.J. Houshmandzadeh** and **Deion Branch**, who were both big-ticket acquisitions, became expendable in Carroll's eyes.

In a sense, it seems fitting that a player many had relegated to big-time bust status has become the undisputed centerpiece of a team that had to have set a record for transactions, moving players in and out with abandon and making it pretty hard for onlookers to determine the team's actual identity.

Which leads to a question very much worth asking: Who else, besides Williams, are considered the biggest building blocks on the Seahawks?

"I would start with the 2010 draft class, with guys like (first-round OLT **Russell Okung**, (first-round FS **Earl Thomas**, (fourth-round CB **Walter Thurmond** and (fifth-round SS **Kam Chancellor** definitely being counted on a lot," the observer told PFW. "After that, I would go with (star RS) **Leon Washington**, who has become a major presence both on and off the field; (starting OLB) **David Hawthorne**, who signed an extension early in the season; and (MLB) **Lofa Tatupu**."

"Even though Tatupu is not the player he was in his first three seasons, Carroll loves the guy because he's like a coach on the field and gets everything set properly."

"I also think they're sold on the RB tandem of (**Marshawn Lynch** and (**Justin Forsett** and the way they complement one another."

COVER STORY

PATRIOTS STRIKE GOLD

In replacing a pair of veterans, RBs BenJarvus Green-Ellis and Danny Woodhead went from no-names to household names in New England **By IAN R. RAPOPORT**

FOXBOROUGH, Mass. — BenJarvus Green-Ellis had barely propped himself up off the Gillette Stadium turf, and Patriots coach Bill Belichick was already running out to meet him.

It was the end of a meaningless game, the regular-season finale that the Patriots had in their pocket since before halftime. Yet the drama, for some, had only recently ended.

Green-Ellis, the sudden star, busted out a 10-yard run, cutting behind the block of reserve OT Quinn Ojinnaka and breaking into the open field. When he landed, he had reached a milestone that observers would have thought impossible prior to the 2010 season.

He's gained more than 1,000 rushing yards.

The reticent Green-Ellis shrugged — like he always does.

"Don't have time to get mesmerized or stuck in some kind of moment," he said.

But it was Belichick's reaction that was priceless.

Already near the hashmarks, Belichick raced out, searching for the ball to provide Green-Ellis with a keepsake, then searching for his ball-carrier for a thunderous embrace.

In a stunning 14-2 season, one that has featured contributions from a bevy of under-the-radar stars, Green-Ellis is the example. And he's not the only one in his own backfield.

Tag-team partner Danny Woodhead, who is third in the NFL among rushers with 60-plus carries with 5.6 yards per carry, joins him in significance.

"The running backs are a tight-knit group, and I think we feed off of each other," Woodhead said. "Football is a team sport, and we are a team."

An underpublicized, unexpected, out-of-nowhere duo. For an offense that boasts star QB Tom Brady, receivers like Pro Bowler Wes Welker and former Super Bowl MVP Deion Branch, it's easy to figure out where the spotlights shine.

That's why Green-Ellis' 10-yard carry was so significant. For once, a Patriots running back received the credit he deserved.

"Benny has been steady, he's been wanting it," veteran RB Fred Taylor said. "And it comes from — it's his family. That's just the mindset that they have. He's a young guy

with an old soul. He's very mature, very smart, and he's passionate about what he's doing. That's just BenJarvus."

Afterward, Belichick downplayed the significance, saying his team was more focused on team goals than individual achievements. His actions told the real story of how much he valued the accomplishment. So did the actions of Green-Ellis' teammates.

"(Belichick) was just saying that we worked hard and we earned it," Green-Ellis recounted, following the 38-7 win over the Dolphins on Jan. 2. "We went out every day as an offensive unit and we worked hard. We worked hard. And Kevin (Faulk) was on the sideline; he kept telling me, 'Keep running hard, we need to get here.' That's kind of what I did."

It is what Green-Ellis always does. It's what Woodhead does, too.

Green-Ellis, the 5-11, 215-pounder, gained 1,008 yards on 229 carries with an average of 4.4 yards per rush and

Ellis and Woodhead, in their quietly productive way, get it done. They've allowed Brady, who is on an unprecedented streak of 335 passes without an interception, to befuddle defenses with devastating play-action and keep the chains moving.

Welker (86 catches for 848 yards) and TEs Aaron Hernandez (563 receiving yards) and Rob Gronkowski (10 touchdowns) have feasted underneath on linebackers who are slowed in coverage while following the play fake.

Last year, there was a threat of a run game. This year, with an assist from blocking TE Alge Crumpler, there is an actual, real run game.

Simply, Green-Ellis and Woodhead go to work. Yet earlier in the season, it would not have surprised anyone if both were out of work.

Green-Ellis was on the verge of ending up on the cutting-room floor, as the Patriots already had four stable, veteran running backs. He was merely a special-teamer. Then, the dominoes began to fall.

Former first-round draft pick Laurence Maroney was traded, shipped to the Broncos for a mid-round pick. Then, early in the season, Taylor suffered turf toe on both feet, an ailment that sidelined him for two months.

Green-Ellis was simply available and ready. He hasn't fumbled since high school, he always falls forward and he hasn't missed a game.

In a star-studded backfield that featured two first-round picks and a second-rounder in Faulk, who may be one of the NFL's best third-down backs ever, it wasn't any of them who has toted the rock this year with the game on the line.

"I never worry about things that I can't control," Green-Ellis said. "The only thing I can control is coming to

practice, coming to the games, working hard, do the best that I can and put my best foot forward."

As for Woodhead, his story is just as out-of-the-blue.

Despite his star turn on the HBO docudrama "Hard Knocks," and despite everyone who followed the Jets realizing that he was far more valuable than disappointing fourth-round pick Joe McKnight, Woodhead was released by the Jets after Week One. He wasn't unemployed for long.

The Patriots swooped in and signed him before their matchup with Gang Green, and the thought was that Be-

WHO ARE THESE GUYS?



BenJARVUS GREEN-ELLIS

COLLEGE: MISSISSIPPI
(UNDRAFTED)

HT: 5-11 • WT: 215 • EXP: 3

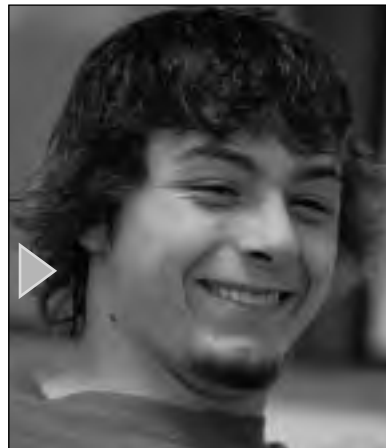
ATT	YDS	AVG	LG	TDS
229	1,008	4.4	33	13

DANNY WOODHEAD

COLLEGE: CHADRON STATE
(UNDRAFTED)

HT: 5-8 • WT: 195 • EXP: 3

ATT	YDS	AVG	LG	TDS
97	547	5.6	36	5



13 touchdowns, with a total number of negative carries that can be counted on one hand.

Woodhead, the 5-8, 195-pounder, gained 547 yards on 97 carries with five touchdowns, not to mention his 379 receiving yards that came on 34 catches.

No wonder the Patriots are ninth in rushing with 123.3 yards per game and 10th with 4.3 yards per rush.

"We call those guys 'playmakers,'" RB coach Ivan Fears said. "Those guys have that. That's why they're on the field."

No-nonsense businessmen, they simply work. Green-

lichick's goal was simply to pump him for information. Nope.

Faulk tore his ACL in Week Two, and there was little Woodhead, waiting and poised. At first, teammates shrugged off his performances — a 36-yard winding touchdown run against the Colts, a 22-yard run against Buffalo, his 104-receiving-yard explosion vs. his old team in the second meeting.

They spouted the company line, saying he was simply playing Faulk's role, not taking Faulk's place. By now, there is no denying, Woodhead has done what Faulk did and maybe more.

"He understands the rules and assignments," Fears said. "He's done an excellent job of picking up our schemes. And most importantly, he's been doggone effective as a blocker. He's stood up against guys when he's had to and he's cut them down when he had the opportunity to."

Their styles could not be more different.

Green-Ellis is tough and physical, never one to duck or dodge, regularly taking hard shots from tacklers. He gets yards — rarely more, rarely less. He thrives on one simple cut, then holds the ball tight, bows his neck and charges forward.

"Benny's been running great," Brady said. "Benny sees the hole, he hits it. He's got really good vision. It's not like we're looking to run every play outside and run around the corner."

Woodhead is short and stocky, with sharp, quick steps that take him nearly as fast side-to-side as they do north and south. He runs in quick bursts, hiding behind his linemen and making it difficult for defenders to find him. That's an inherent advantage few have. And when he makes a cut, he comes out of it at the same speed as he went into it.

"He's amazing, and no one thinks a little kid like that is going to be able to get through a line and make people miss and break tackles," Hernandez said. "Woodhead can do it all — passing game, coming out of the backfield, running the ball — he does it all."

Asked if Woodhead can do what Faulk did, Branch immediately begins nodding.

"That's a good job by the scouting department, the guys upstairs going out, getting the right guys that fit that position," Branch said. "I guess, thanks to the Jets, they let him go that easy. He's a great player; he's a great teammate to be around."

The result is a one-touch punch that Patriots fans may watch for years to come. Don't be surprised if Faulk, Taylor and Sammy Morris all retire or are let go following the season. They have had long and productive careers.

The new blood is Woodhead, who just signed a two-year deal that included a \$425,000 signing bonus, and Green-Ellis, whose minimum contract expires after this season. Perhaps the Patriots add a running back in the draft (Alabama's Mark Ingram, anyone?), but if not, they may only add a complementary piece in free agency.

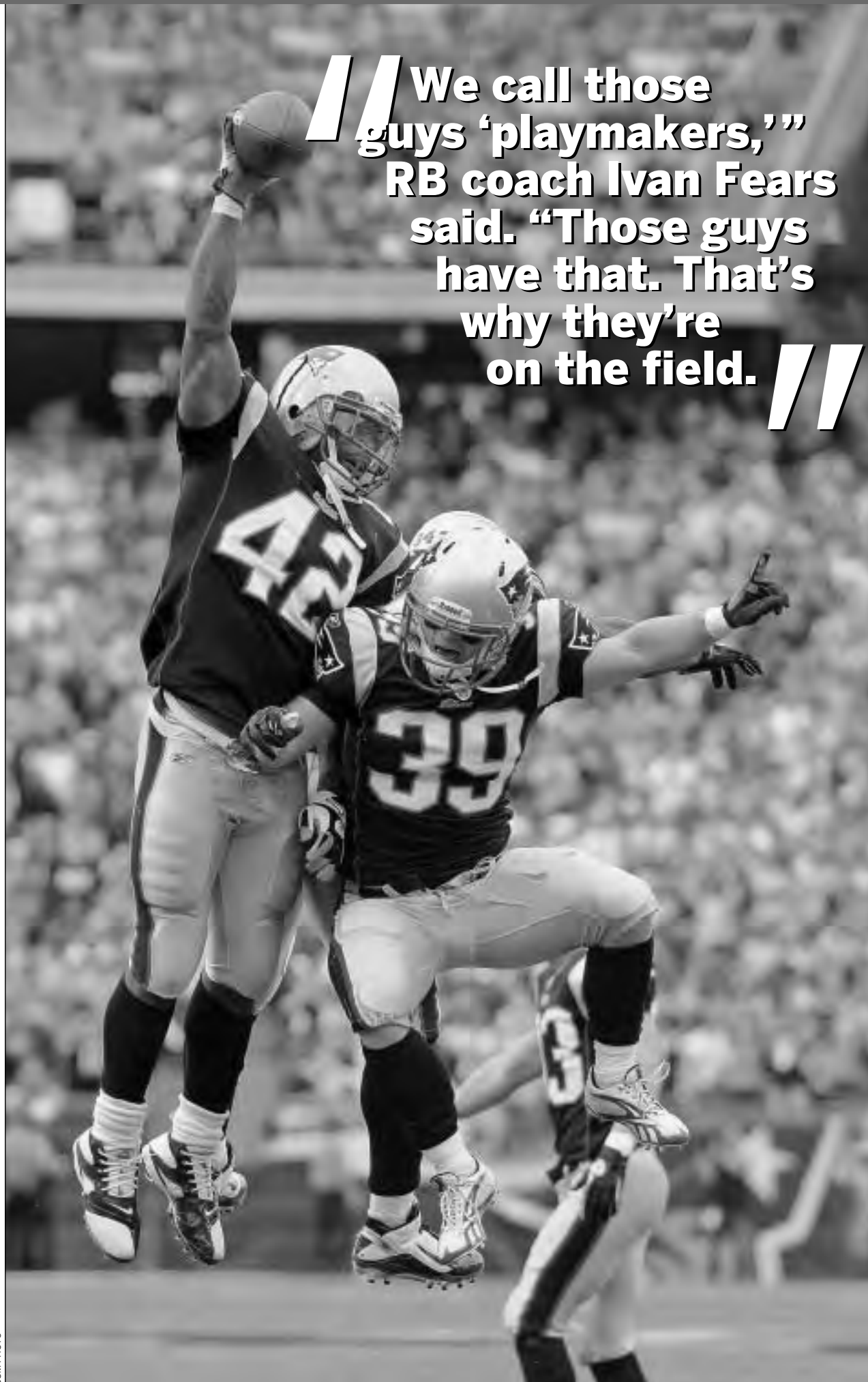
Over the course of the year, their faces have entered the public's consciousness. But they are beginning to get recognized. Woodhead recently took part in a Reebok commercial where he pretended to be a clerk selling his own jersey, and just a few people caught on. Expect that to change. It will for Green-Ellis, too.

On Sunday, Green-Ellis will be on the field for the Patriots' first playoff game, and Woodhead will shake off a head injury to follow after him.

"We're not slacking off," Green-Ellis said. "We got to continue to get better."

Knowing them, they will.

Ian R. Rapoport covers the Patriots for the Boston Herald.



// We call those guys 'playmakers,'"
RB coach Ivan Fears
said. "Those guys
have that. That's
why they're
on the field. //

FEATURE



RISE AND SHINE

Mike Smith has gone from a little-known NFL assistant to the leader of one of the league's most consistent winners with a steady, upbeat and humble approach

By **DAN PARR**

As he watched the Falcons lose to the Saints on the night of Dec. 27, Phil Richart tried to think of a word — one that fit the situation the Falcons were facing and one that would register with Falcons head coach Mike Smith. The 68-year-old retiree helps mold Smith less now than when he coached him on the varsity football team at Father Lopez Catholic High School in Daytona Beach, Fla., more than 30 years ago.

Richart sends his postgame analysis to Smith each week from his home in Orlando shortly after the Falcons play. He did it after Smith coached his first preseason game for Atlanta in 2008, and it became a tradition. The messages are brief. Richart says he's not overly inspirational. It's not anything that will bring Smith to a higher level of coaching consciousness.

"I don't know that he's listening," Richart said. "He's kind enough to put up with me."

Of course, Smith is hanging on every word and he always replies. Smith's not one to ignore anyone and he's certainly not going to blow off his old coach, for whom he babysat when the only child in the Richart family, Larry, was growing up.

Smith is a coach's coach. He's the son of a coach. He started coaching for Richart when he was a senior in high school after a broken arm cut his season short in the second game of the year, and he remembers the names of his first youth basketball and baseball coaches.

Those are his mentors, but he soaks up knowledge wherever he can find it.

"No one is beneath (Smith) as far as learning," Falcons GM Thomas Dimitroff said. "He believes he can learn from anyone. Anyone from the custodial staff all the way to the top of the organization."

Plus, Richart's evaluations can be a pleasant break from the others that come his way.

"His critiques are probably a little less critical than some of the mail I might get during the week," Smith said.

Atlanta's three-point loss to New Orleans at the Georgia Dome that Monday night marked only the fourth Falcons home defeat during Smith's tenure, and it prevented them from locking up the division title and the No. 1 seed in the NFC. It was far from a crisis situation — the Falcons would go on to blow out the Panthers the next week to secure that top seed — but in the immediate aftermath of the missed opportunity against the Saints, Richart's message emphasized a theme that was familiar to both him and Smith.

"I sent him an e-mail that in capital letters said, 'REGROUP,' " recalled Richart, a heart attack and stroke survivor.

Some thought Smith was in too far over his head inheriting a team that had just experienced a season in which its franchise player was sent to prison and its previous head coach quit after 13 games to take a college job. Smith came to Atlanta as a relative unknown after serving as the Jaguars' defensive coordinator for five years.

Most observers believed it would take a massive rebuilding effort, and perhaps a few seasons, to turn Atlanta into a winner. Smith and the Falcons operated on their own schedule, however.

No head coach in Falcons history has had more wins in his first three seasons. And Atlanta had never had back-to-back winning seasons, let alone three in a row, before Smith led to them to finishes of 11-5, 9-7 and 13-3.

In fact, since he took over in '08, only one head coach in the league, the Patriots' Bill Belichick, has more regular-season wins than Smith's 33.

The first steps he took after he was hired didn't have much to do with installing new schemes or on-field matters, but they played a significant role in healing a broken



QB Matt Ryan and head coach Mike Smith have combined to lead the Falcons to three winning seasons in a row since arriving in Atlanta in 2008.

franchise.

Smith immediately opened up lines of communication between the players and the coaching staff. He also introduced himself to all of his co-workers, not just the 53 players on the active roster.

They were small steps that made a big difference, and Smith was a veteran when it came to regrouping by the end of Year One, a year that saw him earn The Associated Press' NFL Coach of the Year honors.

It may have something to do with things he experienced and the dues he paid while serving as an assistant in stops at San Diego State, Morehead State and Tennessee Tech during his 16 years at the collegiate level. Perhaps it has to do with being the oldest of eight kids — he has four sisters and three brothers — and watching his parents, Sam and Carol, who were both teachers, at least primarily — Smith's father took on "more odd jobs than you could shake a stick at," according to Richart — work hard to keep their children in private school.

Smith just doesn't change much, even when the perceptions other people have of him evolve.

Those who knew Smith before he became a head coach say he's just as grounded as he was before having success at the highest level of his profession.

"Mike is the same guy he was three years ago as far as a person," said Dimitroff, who was hired several days before Smith. "He's a humble guy. He's a very genuine person. He has a really good combination of humility and confidence."

Mike Peterson, a linebacker who's in his 12th NFL season, has known Smith since '03, Peterson's first year as Jacksonville's starting middle linebacker and Smith's first season as the team's defensive coordinator. Peterson credits Smith as "the main, and probably the only, reason" that he signed with Atlanta, where he has started 29-of-32 games, before the '09 season.

"Smitty's still the same Smitty," he said. "He carries himself the same way. He speaks to the team the same way he spoke to the defense when he was the D-coordinator (in Jacksonville). That's a good thing."

Peterson said he and his Jaguars teammates had a pretty good idea of where Smith was headed from the be-

ginning, and they used to tell him he was going to be a head coach before long. Smith wouldn't have it, though.

"He was like, 'Nah, I'm not going anywhere,'" Peterson said. "Never really thought of it until we actually started winning and the defense started getting in the limelight."

All of the attention that followed Falcons owner Arthur Blank's decision to make Smith his head coach, which wasn't greeted with exuberance from fans or analysts from around the league, caused Smith to adjust. He has gone from the career assistant who dodged the spotlight to bobbing his head along with his players and Blank on a bus in a nationally aired commercial advertising the NFL's Play 60 campaign. While Smith said the focus should be on his players, it didn't take him long to notice eyes were going to follow him, regardless.

"Everybody in the building is looking toward you for how the feel of the building is going to be," Smith said. "If you're not upbeat, everybody's watching, and they may not have the right attitude when they come in. ... When I was fortunate enough to get this job, one of the things that I told myself — and I've tried to stay true to it — is I'm never going to have a bad day."

"I might have bad moments in the day, but at the end of the day it's going to end up being a good day."

Some might call that an unrealistic, or perhaps an unhealthy, mental approach. Smith doesn't spend time worrying about whether it is or not.

"You can always tell his mind is spinning," Falcons C Todd McClure said. "He manages a lot of things. He's very detail-oriented, from our schedules to letting us know, ahead of time, days we're going to be off. He had our schedule ready all the way up to the Super Bowl back in March."

Now that schedule to the final game of the postseason has been nearly completed. The Falcons are only two home wins away from it.

The team still remembers what it's like to be one-and-done in the playoffs. It lost the only playoff game it has played under Smith back in his first season on the job. He calls the postseason experience of losing at Arizona in the wild-card round valuable, but he doesn't try to predict what effect it will have on his team this year. That's not Smith's style.

He's not interested in discussing the team's "internal" goals or the contract extension that probably will be coming his way this offseason. Smith has one year left on a four-year deal that reportedly was worth between \$8 million and \$10 million.

"There's a time and a place for that," Smith said. "Now is not the time or the place. It's important for us to have all of our energy and focus on the next game."

It's that commitment to looking ahead and never getting too satisfied with how far he has come and the disciplined core that it comes from that makes Richart so proud. Smith regroups over and over again, regardless of whether the last game was a win or a loss or whether the last moment went well or poorly.

It's hard to lose when you don't allow yourself to have a bad day.

Richart hasn't been to a game at the Georgia Dome, although Smith has invited him. The old coach has been hesitant to be around a big crowd ever since health issues affected his vision.

If the Falcons do make a playoff run, though, Richart is going to have a hard time staying put.

"If they make the Super Bowl, I think (Smith) could talk me into (going)," he said. "I would go down early enough where I could see him so I don't mess up any of his preparation times and such. I wouldn't want to do that."

"And hell, he wouldn't let me."

The coach still knows Smith too well.

FEATURE

CUTLER DEBUTS

It took five seasons,
but the signalcaller is
ready for his first playoff
appearance in the NFL

By **BOB LeGERE**

Anyone who's watched the Bears on TV has seen an emotional Jay Cutler, an irritated Jay Cutler, a teed-off Jay Cutler, an irate Jay Cutler or an exasperated Jay Cutler. That's Cutler on the field. He's not hard to read.

Off the field, he's almost always the laid-back Cutler. Well, except sometimes when he's dealing with the media. He's usually pretty low-key then, too, but he can also appear preoccupied, bored and anxious to be almost anywhere else. He's also likely to provide a thoughtful response to an intelligent question. He doesn't suffer fools gladly on or off the field.

That's Jay Cutler. On rare occasions, he's lived down to the reputation that followed him to Chicago from Denver — aloof, arrogant and peevish. But the Bears have no buyer's remorse after trading their own starting quarterback, Kyle Orton, two first-round draft choices and a third-rounder for Cutler and a fifth-round pick on April 2, 2009. The good has far outweighed the bad.

Cutler hasn't yet moved into the exclusive neighborhood of elite NFL quarterbacks like Tom Brady, Peyton Manning and Drew Brees, but he made some major strides this year under new offensive coordinator Mike Martz. His passer rating jumped from last year's career-worst 76.8 to 86.3. He cut his interceptions from 26 to 16 and increased his yards per attempt from 6.6 to 7.6 despite being sacked more times than any quarterback in the NFL.

"He has everything that you need as a quarterback to get to that (elite) level," Bears GM Jerry Angelo said. "He still needs to have more of a body of work to be put in there in comparison with them because all of those guys have great résumés. Hopefully Jay is going to have a great résumé, and hopefully this year is the start of that."

"He's off to a very good start. He has all of the traits to be an elite quarterback, but the bottom line is the bottom line. You've got to win football games. Winning the division is one step; now we get into the playoffs. But we feel very, very good about his progress."

Cutler's progress hasn't been limited to statistics. Last season, when a young receiving corps deserved some of the blame for Cutler's NFL-worst 26 interceptions, the quarterback showed newfound maturity, refusing to toss anyone under the bus. He was throwing to rookie Johnny Knox, second-year player and first-time starter Earl Bennett, Devin Hester or Devin Aromashodu, who all made their share of mistakes, but Cutler accepted the blame, even when he didn't deserve it.

This year, Cutler was sacked a whopping 52 times, but he never blamed an offensive line in flux that suffered through some embarrassing outings before finally jelling in the final weeks of the season.

There is no shortage of game film on Cutler reacting angrily to poor perfor-

mance on the field, but according to Martz, it's always self-disgust.

"I think his frustrations are in his own performance, if he doesn't play well," Martz said. "If he's frustrated with the other players, he doesn't say it to me. I'm not aware of it. Obviously if we fail at something, he's very frustrated, but he takes responsibility for that."

It's not that Cutler has never had words with a teammate in the heat of battle. What field general hasn't? But Bennett said Cutler goes about it the right way. The two of them go back to Vanderbilt when, in Cutler's final year with the Commodores, Bennett was his leading receiver with 79 catches and nine touchdowns — as a true freshman.

"He'll pull you aside, if we're not on the same page, and talk about what he sees and what he's looking for from you," Bennett said, starting to laugh. "Then, after he completes the same pass later in the game, he'll just look at you like, 'See what happens when you listen to me?'"

Cutler is nothing if not confident. When he was asked about taking more command in the huddle or more of a leadership role in the playoffs, he said that wouldn't be necessary. He's already got the situation under control.

"I'm not going to change anything," Cutler said. "Those guys understand. (While) I get the play, (center) Olin (Kreutz) is going to do his talking. When I get in the huddle, it's going to be my huddle, and we're going to tell everyone what to do. If we've got to make corrections, we'll make corrections. But we're not going to change anything we've done the past 16 games."

Martz saw no reason to discuss with Cutler the importance of playoff football, same as he didn't have to talk to Kurt Warner when the Rams' "Greatest Show on Turf" first went to the postseason.

"I've always felt that was unnecessary," Martz said. "Kurt went through that the first time, but they know. (Cutler) has been around. If he were a rookie or something like that, I'd talk to him. But he's been in some big games this year, kind of a playoff atmosphere. We just talk about managing the game, like we do every week with him."

Combine that Cutler confidence with the rare arm strength that enables him to squeeze the ball through tiny windows of opportunity and the surprising athleticism for a 6-3, 233-pound quarterback, and you've got a potential franchise player. Only five quarterbacks had more rushing yards than Cutler's 232.

The quality in Cutler that often gets overlooked is his intelligence. Not just the innate, book-learning kind, but football smarts. Cutler's ability to grasp concepts almost immediately has impressed Martz from the day they met 11 months ago.

"He's as sharp an individual as I've ever been around," Martz said. "Mentally, it can be a dangerous thing for me, because



It took a little while, but Jay Cutler seems to have a firm grasp on Mike Martz's complex system, leading the Bears to wins in seven of their last nine games.

sometimes I've put too much on him because I know he can handle it. I have to be very careful of that because he's so smart. He's just very, very sharp — not just smart smart, but football-awareness (smart) — and he has a great feel for it. He's a one-time guy. I take him out there and I give him one rep, and he has a good feel for it."

It remains to be seen how quickly the 27-year-old Cutler picks up postseason football, since he's never participated in the NFL playoffs.

"Jay will be cool and collected, but I'm pretty sure he's going to be pumped about the game," Bennett said. "He'll lead us to victory, same as what he's been doing recently."

Cutler said he couldn't even watch the NFL playoffs the past four seasons. "You go through 16 games, and you watch all the film that you watch and then you don't get in," he said. "It definitely takes a toll on you, and it's hard on you. I just never have."

Cutler and Bennett never even went to a bowl game at Vanderbilt. This season was first that ended above .500 for Cutler since he led Heritage Hills High School in Lincoln City, Ind., to the state championship in his senior season.

After the bye week at the end of October, which the Bears entered with a 4-3 record, Cutler helped orchestrate victories in seven of eight games prior to the

meaningless — to the Bears, anyway — regular-season-ending loss to the Packers. During that streak, Cutler had four games with passer ratings over 104.0 and a fifth at 97.6.

"Jay started to get more comfortable with the offense and in his role," GM Angelo said. "You saw him starting to move around a little bit more, too, which bodes well for him and the offense because he kept plays alive and started making plays downfield."

Fortunately for the Bears, Cutler was able to grasp the complexities of Martz's playbook a lot quicker than most quarterbacks, although he admits it wasn't easy.

"This is a concept-driven offense," he said. "You've got to understand the whole picture of why things are designed the way they're designed. It takes time. The receivers have to have a really good feel, too."

"In some offenses, you can kind of tell the receiver just go do this and don't worry about it," he said. "But in this offense, you have to know why the guy inside of you is doing that, and why the guy inside of him is doing that. It takes all 11 guys, and if one guy is off-key, it will throw it off."

It's up to Cutler to keep the Bears' offense in harmony, and he's never been more ready for the role.

Bob LeGere covers the Bears for the Daily Herald.

FEATURE

QUIET LEADERSHIP

Leslie Frazier earned the Vikings' head-coaching job with his calm during the team's storm

By **JUDD ZULGAD**

Leslie Frazier's six-game stint as the Vikings' interim head coach was far from a smashing success on the field.

Frazier, who inherited a 3-7 team on Nov. 22 when Brad Childress was fired, led the Vikings to a 3-3 finish. An upset of the Eagles was his only victory over a club with a winning record; the three losses to the Giants, Bears and Lions came by a combined score of 81-30.

So why were few surprised when owner Zygi Wilf lifted the interim tag from Frazier's title a day after the regular season ended and introduced him as the eighth coach in the Vikings' 50-year history?

Because simply looking at what the Vikings accomplished on the field under Frazier was to have missed the much bigger picture of all the things the former Bears cornerback did to hold this franchise together through the final month of its season.

Included was the collapse of the Metrodome roof on Dec. 12, forcing two "home" games to be moved to different venues — including one in Detroit — and the postponement of the Eagles game from Sunday to Tuesday because of an expected snowstorm in the Philadelphia area. That left the Vikings hanging around a downtown hotel for two days, wondering what could go wrong next.

There were points where the 51-year-old Frazier probably felt like he was dealing more in crisis management than football. Yet, he never seemed to get flustered or lose his cool. Not with the media, not with the public and, most importantly, not



Leslie Frazier's track record as a defensive coach and his guidance during the Vikings' trying season were big reasons why he earned the job full time.

with his team.

"I've got to think it factored in there with some of the things that we faced," Frazier said when asked if that helped his cause. "Mark [Wilf, the team president] and Zygi could probably answer that better than I could. But you have to believe that some of the things that we dealt with and the way they were handled factored into the decision."

Mark Wilf, who is Zygi's younger brother, acknowledged this fact.

"It was an important factor," he said.

"It's part of the evaluation. He's a great listener, he leads wonderfully by example and I think he listens and makes good decisions. We saw a lot of that through a lot of the adversity, especially the last few weeks. So it was just another factor to reinforce what we felt."

Frazier's style often has drawn comparison to former Buccaneers and Colts head coach Tony Dungy. There is good reason for this.

The two men are very good friends, and Dungy has been a mentor to Frazier

through the years. In fact, it was Dungy who created a position on his coaching staff for Frazier after Frazier's two-year stint as the Bengals' defensive coordinator came to an end following the 2004 season.

Dungy's original intention had been to help Frazier get hired with another team. When that didn't happen, Dungy named Frazier as a special assistant to the head coach and also gave him the job of assisting with the defensive backs.

Frazier lasted only two years with the Colts before being hired as the Vikings' defensive coordinator in 2007 after Mike Tomlin left Childress' staff to take over as head coach of the Steelers.

Frazier took over a Tampa-2-style defense and helped lead it into the top 10 in each of the past three seasons (sixth in 2008 and '09 and eighth in '10). The Vikings' 162 sacks from 2007-10 were the fifth-most of any NFL team during that time, and the run defense gave up the second-fewest rushing yards per game (85.1 average) and the ninth-fewest points per game (20.4 average) in the league over the past four years.

Frazier's success in Minnesota helped him go from a guy who was having trouble finding a job to someone who was considered to be a hot property in the NFL. Over the past three offseasons, he has interviewed for seven head-coaching jobs and was a finalist four times. Frazier was given an assistant head-coaching title by the Vikings in 2008.

Frazier and Dungy are both men of deep faith, and perhaps that's why Frazier never gave up hope that his opportunity would come. He just didn't know where.

"I always believed that it would happen," Frazier said. "Whenever it would happen, it was going to be the perfect situation for me."

Of course, Frazier had little reason to believe that chance would be in Minnesota. In Childress' first four seasons, his teams had gone from 6-10 to 8-8 to 10-6 to 12-4 and a berth in the NFC title game last season.

Childress received a contract extension through the 2013 season as the Vikings piled up victories last season, but he lasted

JEFF FISHER

only 10 games this year. The Vikings' 3-7 record certainly played a role, but so did the fact that Childress and QB Brett Favre continued to have friction between them and Childress also took it upon himself to attempt to jettison recalcitrant WR Randy Moss in early November without first informing ownership.

Zygi Wilf, who is based in New Jersey, did his own due diligence of what was happening in the organization by talking to players and others at Winter Park.

Childress lasted three more games, but after back-to-back losses to Chicago and Green Bay — an embarrassing 31-3 defeat against the archrival Packers at home was the final straw — Childress was let go, and a guy who best would be described as the antithesis of Childress was put in his place.

"I guess [Leslie] and I kind of share the same faith and realize, 'The Lord is in control, and things happen for a reason,'" said Dungy, who now works as a studio analyst for NBC's "Football Night in America" show. "When he left Cincinnati and came with us, no one could have predicted that it would have worked out to come with us. We didn't even have a spot at the time.

"But two years with us and then going to Minnesota and getting passed over for some other jobs ... I know how that is being disappointed. You interview and you're close; maybe you're the second choice for two or three jobs and you're wondering if it's ever going to happen. Knowing Leslie, I know he didn't want it to happen this way, taking over for a good friend of his [in Childress]. But just all in all, if you're patient and you continue to do your work really well, eventually it will get noticed."

Most importantly by the right organization and the right people.

That's why as an emotional Frazier stood at the podium inside the Vikings' practice facility during his first news conference as a permanent head coach in the NFL, it was clear he believed his wait had been well worth it.

"This is a special day for a lot of reasons," he said. "I couldn't think of a situation I would rather be in than the one I am currently in. Sometimes in life you have dreams, you have aspirations, and sometimes you achieve those and sometimes you fall short.

"For me, this is a dream come true. And to be doing it in a place where I am very familiar with the surroundings, very familiar with how we operate, you couldn't ask for a better situation, which makes me believe it's only a matter of time before we deliver what our fans and this organization deserves. A world championship. I believe that's going to happen. I believe it in my heart."

Judd Zulgad covers the Vikings for the Star Tribune.



ADVANCED PLANNING Mickey Spagnola

Garrett was Jones' choice all along

ARLINGTON, Texas — And in the end, the Cowboys named Jason Garrett the franchise's eighth head coach.

Just what they wanted to do from the beginning.

But don't fool yourself. Nov. 8, 2010, was not the beginning, not when Cowboys owner Jerry Jones decided former head coach Wade Phillips had lost this team, that these Cowboys whom many projected to be a Super Bowl contender were somehow stuck in a morass of mediocrity. And not when Jones, knowing he needed to make the first in-season change of his 22-year reign as owner and general manager, lateraled a 1-7 team playing without its franchise quarterback to Garrett, then the assistant head coach and offensive coordinator.

Those who did not intimately know the former Cowboys third-string and eventually backup QB from 1993-99 or understand the always-racing mind of Jones started handicapping Garrett's chances of becoming the team's next head coach. They insisted Garrett had to go something like 6-2 over the final eight games to earn the job or maybe 5-3, but at least 4-4; otherwise this supposed "trial" period as interim head coach would be judged as an abject failure.

And so, really, that the Cowboys turned a 1-7 first half of the season into a 5-3 second half had no bearing on Jones interviewing just two other candidates. Both were minority coaches to amply satisfy the NFL's Rooney Rule — in-house candidate Ray Sherman and former secondary coach Todd Bowles. Then just four days after the conclusion of the most disappointing season in the franchise's 51-year history, the Cowboys proudly were introducing the guy formerly known as "Red Ball" during his playing days as the next head coach at Cowboys Stadium.

"I'm going to be very candid with you," Jones said. "Everything that I did to get to this point today had to do with how much I thought of Jason and where I thought our future was.

"I interviewed this guy over here (Garrett) four years ago and certainly, in my imagination, hoped this could work out to ultimately become the head coach."

In fact, the truth of the matter is, this idea of Garrett possibly becoming the head coach of the Cowboys first sprouted back in January of 2000, when Garrett's expiring contract made him an unrestricted free agent. Jones admits at the time he tried to talk Garrett into hanging up his pads and embark on a coaching career with the Cowboys.

At the time, Garrett was just turning 34. He believed he had a few years left playing, even if that meant continuing as a career backup. He told Jones, "You know, I can always coach, but I only can play so much longer."

So he played, and made some more serious money when he could, spending the next four years with the Giants (2000-03) after initially signing a three-year, \$2.94 million deal, complete with a \$250,000 signing bonus and \$440,000 first-year base — certainly more than any assistant-coaching job would have paid at the time — and even going to another Super Bowl, to boot. He even spent a fifth year playing, split between Tampa Bay and Miami.

Jones admits, "I stayed mad at him for about two years because he wouldn't let me sell him on (quitting) playing and coming in and start coaching now, and went to the Giants ... it's always been pretty obvious with his background that he had the potential to become a head coach."

Now that's where this all began, and the process continued in late January of 2007, when Jones had to receive special permission to speak to Garrett about an assistant-coaching job. He had been with the Dolphins for two seasons, and newly named head coach Cam Cameron was offering Garrett a one-year extension. Then-Dolphins owner Wayne Huizenga didn't have to grant per-



Both Jason Garrett and Jerry Jones expected Garrett to one day ascend to the Cowboys' head-coaching position.

mission for what was considered in the NFL to be a lateral move.

So when Garrett came back to The Ranch on Jan. 24 that year for the interview, Huizenga told Jones if you are going to name him your offensive coordinator, then do it by the 25th; otherwise he would not let Garrett out of Miami. And that's how Jones ended up hiring Garrett before naming Wade Phillips head coach.

Plus, this just doesn't happen in the NFL to any guy. Sean Payton tried to bring Garrett to New Orleans as his figurehead offensive coordinator in 2006. College coaches such as LSU's Les Miles and Alabama's Nick Saban, who gave Garrett his first coaching job at Miami, tried to bring him to their programs. Scott Linehan, who had a big hand in his Miami hire, wanted Garrett to meet him in St. Louis. Even Norv Turner tried to hire Garrett as an assistant in Oakland before Garrett had coached a down.

Then, after his first year in Dallas as offensive coordinator, teams aplenty came courting Garrett: Baltimore and Atlanta offered jobs. More interviews ensued the next year: Denver, Detroit and St. Louis.

And get this: Even before Garrett returned to the Cowboys, his Tampa Bay head coach, Jon Gruden, was saying this about the coaching potential of his former backup QB: "He's going to be a superstar."

Could so many be so wrong?

Hiring a head coach is a gamble. There are no guarantees, and this one is no different, especially with a former player just six years into his coaching career and owning only eight games of head-coaching experience. But to Jones, this is a highly educated gamble, turning to someone who has grown before his very eyes for most of the past 18 seasons and whom he has helped cultivate as a potential head coach along the way.

When asked what he learned about Garrett over the eight weeks serving as the 'Boys' interim head coach, Jones essentially said, but in far more words, "Nothing," and would go on to say, "There wasn't a big decision here for me, on a personal basis."

That's because he knew all he needed to know all along ... and what he wanted to do from the very beginning.

Mickey Spagnola covers the Cowboys for DallasCowboys.com.

OPINION



PUBLISHER'S PEN Hub Arkush, publisher/editor

Commish misses point with letter

NFL commissioner Roger Goodell authored an open letter to NFL fans to update them on the status of the league's Collective Bargaining Agreement. We've reprinted it here in PFW because we believe it is important that as many fans as possible know exactly where the league and its commissioner stand, and because we believe it may raise as many questions as it answers.

In the third paragraph from the end Goodell says, "My job is to represent the game — the fans, teams, players, coaches and business partners. Protecting the integrity of the game and ensuring it thrives is a responsibility I take very seriously."

I've been very impressed by Goodell in his first few years on the job and have no doubt of his sincerity and commitment to protecting the integrity of the game, and I believe he truly does his best for the fans and players where he can. But the fact is that fans, players, coaches and business partners had absolutely nothing to say about his hiring, we have absolutely no voice in evaluating his performance and no one but the 32 owners can replace him. To suggest he works for anyone else is folly.

In his letter, the commissioner states, "If both sides give a little, everyone, including fans, will get a lot and the game will improve through innovation." So let's see if we can figure out, from what we're being told here, exactly what everybody's getting and exactly what everybody's giving.

As fans we're getting a commitment from the commissioner that he will do everything possible to make sure the powers-that-be don't kill the Golden Goose, and we're being offered two more regular-season games and two fewer exhibitions, which I'm sure we all look forward to. Unfortunately, we're not getting any idea of what this all is going to cost us, in spite of the many references in the letter to difficult financial times. But hey, you can only pack so much into one letter.

We do need to be very clear on one point, though. Goodell suggests he wants to go from 16 regular-season games and four exhibitions to 18 and two to resolve complaints from fans about the exhibition season. Buying bridges in Brooklyn today, are we? The own-

ers' interest in adding two regular-season games is to generate more revenue, and suggesting anything else is disingenuous at best.

So, what are the players getting? Goodell talks about the league's emphasis on player health and safety, which would be an excellent benefit, if it were entirely true. There can be no disputing the league office has created new rules, fines and punishments to try to protect the players. While we don't believe those efforts are as well-constructed or effective as they could be, there is no disputing their intent, and the players should be grateful.

But when the commissioner suggests that "an enhanced season of 18 regular-season and two preseason games would not add a single game for the players collectively," con men all over the world give him a standing ovation. Anyone who knows anything about the NFL knows that 75-90 percent of the players who play for real on Sundays play only 5-15 percent of those exhibition games they're taking away. Getting players ready for opening day with just two exhibitions might very well cause them to play more, rather than less, in the exhibition season, and it is a simple fact that asking them to go all out 18 times a year rather than 16 can only increase the likelihood of injury and make the game that much more dangerous.

The commissioner also talks about the inequities of unproven rookies making dramatically more than proven veterans because of the ridiculous contracts being given to high draft choices, another area in which I suspect most of us would support change. But what he says specifically about change here is, "That includes a new system that properly compensates proven veterans and retired players by shifting some of the outrageous sums paid to many unproven rookies." Clearly he wants to take money away from current players to give to retired players, but where it's all going is unclear at best, and as near as I can tell, the owners aren't

contributing anything.

Early in his letter, in the fourth paragraph, Goodell says, "From player accountability to player safety, more and better television coverage, upgrading the in-stadium experience, innovations like the RedZone channel, the Draft in prime time and playing the Pro Bowl before the Super Bowl, we are focused on doing what's best for the players, teams and fans." Again I ask: Does anyone believe any of those things were designed for any purpose other than to generate more revenue? And other than the RedZone, which you have to love, how many of those changes do you like or care about?

Let me state again as clearly as I can, I believe Roger Goodell has been a good commissioner so far, and I have no doubt he wants to avoid a lockout and/or protracted, ugly labor negotiations. Now it's time for him to understand the best way to do that is to stop focusing on winning a P.R. war for the owners and start telling us the truth.

What we believe we know is that the NFL owners have asked the players to give back approximately 18 percent of the revenues they're currently receiving because the owners are facing financial pressures, but the owners are unwilling to offer any proof those pressures actually exist. True or false, and whichever it is, why?

I understand neither side can or should negotiate this deal in public or welcome us into the room, but if you expect us to continue paying the freight, aren't we at least entitled to some actual facts about what's going on? After all, when you tell us that Jerry Jones, Daniel Snyder, Robert Kraft and their fellow owners' main interest in going to an 18-game regular season is because of our dissatisfaction with exhibition games, I'll bet the farm the great majority of my fellow fans are as insulted as I am.

GOODSELL'S LETTER TO FANS

The following is the text of an e-mail letter sent from commissioner Roger Goodell to NFL fans on Monday, Jan. 3.

Thanks and a look ahead

With one of the most exciting regular seasons now completed and the playoffs about to begin, let me first thank you and all NFL fans for your incredible support. Many fans have been asking me where we stand on signing a new collective bargaining agreement with the players union. Let me update you and be clear at the outset:

I know we can and will reach an agreement.

My goal as Commissioner now is to help our teams and players find a solution that is fair to everyone and ensures that football becomes more popular, accessible, and fun. We want the next decade to be the best yet for our fans, and I'm ready to work day and night to make that happen.

We've come a long way. Compare where we are today with 10 years ago. From player accountability to player safety, more and better television coverage, upgrading the in-stadium experience, innovations like the RedZone channel, the Draft in prime time and playing the Pro Bowl before the Super Bowl, we are focused on doing what's best for the players, teams, and fans. My priority is and always will be the game and the fans who love our game.

The NFL is great because fans care deeply about it. Economic conditions, however, have changed dramatically inside and outside the NFL since 2006 when we negotiated the last CBA. A 10 percent unemployment rate hurts us all. Fans have limited budgets and rightly want the most for their money. I get it.

Yes, NFL players deserve to be paid well. Unfortunately, economic realities are forcing everyone to make tough choices and the NFL is no different.

These are not easy negotiations, but the outcome can be positive. If both sides give a little, everyone, including fans, will get a lot and the game will improve through innovation.

Even in difficult economic times, a new CBA presents us with the opportunity to secure the future of our game. You may ask how will the NFL look under this vision?

A significant change would be to resolve fan complaints about preseason by modifying our 20-game format. Fans tell us they don't like the quality of the preseason games, and we're listening. An enhanced season of 18 regular season and two preseason games would not add a single game for the players collectively, but would give fans more meaningful, high-quality football.

Our emphasis on player health and safety is absolutely essential to the future of our game. We are strictly enforcing rules that protect players from unnecessarily dangerous play, especially involving hits to the head. We are changing the "play through it" culture to a "player-first" culture to ensure that if a player has a head injury, he doesn't play again until his health is certain. We are also addressing the potential wear-and-tear on players in the way they train in-season and off-season.

It's not just the health of players that concerns us. We must ensure the health of the league. That includes a new system that properly compensates proven veterans and retired players by shifting some of the outrageous sums paid to many unproven rookies. Earlier this year, Sports Illustrated published a list of the 50 highest-paid American athletes that included five 2009 NFL rookies. Every other athlete on the list was a proven veteran. In 2009, NFL clubs contracted \$1.2 billion to 256 drafted rookies with \$585 million guaranteed before they had stepped on an NFL field.

Don't get me wrong: top draft choices will continue to be highly paid. All we're asking for is a return to common sense in paying our rookies. Other leagues have done this and we can too.

These improvements and more will lead to better football, plain and simple. A forward looking CBA that is fair to players and clubs will lead to a great future for the NFL and our fans.

My job is to represent the game — the fans, teams, players, coaches and business partners. Protecting the integrity of the game and ensuring it thrives is a responsibility I take very seriously.

This is about more than a labor agreement. It's about the future of the NFL. We have to improve and will be relentless in our quest. The commitment to our fans is to make the NFL experience even better in the years ahead. With a responsible CBA, we will fulfill that vision.

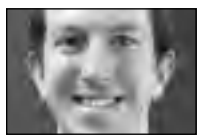
Happy New Year and enjoy the playoffs.

— Roger Goodell



Roger Goodell

OPINION



A MIAMI JOKE Kevin Fishbain

Ross goes about 'search' all wrong

It took less than a week for Stephen Ross to turn the Dolphins into the laughing-stock of the NFL.

In less than a week, Tony Sparano went from simply being on the hot seat to realizing how little confidence his owner, Ross, and friend, general manager Jeff Ireland, had in him to right the ship.

Yet, all that came out of the six bizarre days in South Florida was what should have happened the Monday after the season ended — a commitment to Sparano. But Ross didn't simply retain the coach for 2011, "to maintain stability," as the Dolphins called it, the owner actually gave Sparano a two-year contract extension after back-to-back 7-9 seasons.

The head coach sat expressionless at a media roundtable as Ross explained the events of the prior days. Sparano never broke his stoic look while Ross and Ireland spoke, even as Ross tried to smooth things over by cracking a few jokes.

"I told Tony that he was my man. Jeff said, 'You've got the best guy. The problems we have are all fixable,'" Ross said.

Then Ireland offered his take: "I believe Tony Sparano is the right coach for this football team. I always thought that,

and that has never changed."

But the image that will be indelible in the minds of Dolphins fans is that table. Sparano looked as uncomfortable as can be, and who could blame him?

It was a joke and an embarrassment the way Ross and Ireland treated the entire situation. In today's world of Twitter and the race to get the scoop first, news was leaked faster than Ross could jump on damage control. They should not have gone after Jim Harbaugh without telling Sparano first, but maybe they shouldn't have even got sucked into the Harbaugh party in the first place. Last I checked, Nick Saban went 15-17 the last time the organization brought in a hot college coach.

But it's the way that the duo handled their search and the aftermath, not the idea of it in itself, that made the Dolphins the butt of every joke for six days.

It wasn't ridiculous for Ross and Ireland to consider going in another direction, especially Harbaugh's direction. Sparano's team had an abysmal 1-7 record at home this season, and it's Sparano who had the faith in Chad Henne, and then watched the signalcaller fail in

every opportunity to carry the team to victory. It was Sparano's specialty — the offensive line — that brought the running game from one of the league's best to one of the worst. So a guy like Harbaugh, known for grooming quarterbacks, would make sense.

And Ross should get some credit for coming clean in the roundtable, realizing his mistakes in how he handled the six days. But it never should have gotten to the point where Ross believed he needed to extend Sparano's contract. If 2011 is another disappointment in Miami, Ross will lose more money than he would have if he had fired Sparano this time.

Here is what should have happened:

After Ross and Ireland met with Sparano on the Monday following the team's season finale, and after parting ways with offensive coordinator Dan Henning, the Dolphins should have had one goal in mind — go after a new offensive coordinator. That's it. All their focus should have gone in that direction. That's how Ross and Ireland should have spent their six days — not jetting to California and turning the Dolphins into a punch line.

A-BOMBS

Dan Arkush unleashes his wild-card week reflections.



Busy week leaves bad vibe

While it was far from a really Black Monday the day after the 2010 regular season ground to a halt, it was certainly busy enough. As expected, **Mike Holmgren** cut the cord with Browns head coach **Eric Mangini** first thing in the morning. Before long, the Texans, Giants, Jaguars and Vikings all decided that they would stand pat as far as their head coaches were concerned, with the Giants even going a step further, announcing that they would soon be giving **Tom Coughlin** a new contract. But as was the case last year, a mildly active Monday set the stage for a whirlwind weeklong process. On Tuesday, eyebrows were raised when **Mike Brown** decided to retain **Marvin Lewis**, and **Al Davis** whacked **Tom Cable**. On Wednesday, the Texans hired **Wade Phillips** to be the new defensive coordinator, the Broncos hired **John Elway** as the team's executive VP of football operations and Titans owner **Bud Adams** raised eyebrows even wider when he released a statement that **Vince Young** would not be back in 2011. On Thursday, Bears GM **Jerry Angelo** said he had no intention of retiring anytime soon, the Cowboys officially hired **Jason Garrett** as their new head coach and Cardinals head coach **Ken Whisenhunt** very regretfully dismissed defensive coordinator **Billy Davis**. But the best was yet to come on Friday. Following in the footsteps of **Pete Carroll**, who was in talks to be the head coach of the Seahawks on the Friday after the regular season ended a year ago, **Jim Harbaugh** was named the 49ers' 18th head coach. Meanwhile, in Tennessee, Adams made a smart move when he decided to keep head coach **Jeff Fisher** for an 18th season. My overall feeling of the week's activity is that the fact so many owners decided not to make changes that really needed to be made — I would have cut the cord with Lewis and **Jack Del Rio** in a heartbeat — is because they believe a long labor impasse is indeed on the horizon. Sorry, folks.

Tremendous twosome

Looking beyond the playoffs at the 2011 draft, is it possible the first two overall selections will come anywhere close to being as good as No. 1 pick **Sam Bradford** and No. 2 pick **Ndamukong Suh** were in 2010? Just for fun, let's end these A-bombs by seeing how the Bradford-Suh duo compares with the top one-two duos of the past decade: 2009 (1. QB **Matthew Stafford**, 2. OT **Jason Smith**); 2008 (1. OT **Jake Long**, 2. DE **Chris Long**); 2007 (1. QB **JaMarcus Russell**, 2. WR **Calvin Johnson**); 2006 (1. DE **Mario Williams**, 2. RB **Reggie Bush**); 2005 (1. QB **Alex Smith**, 2. RB **Ronnie Brown**); 2004 (1. QB **Eli Manning**, 2. OG **Robert Gallery**); 2003 (1. QB **Carson Palmer**, 2. RB **Charles Rogers**); 2002 (1. QB **David Carr**, 2. DE **Julius Peppers**); 2001 (1. QB **Michael Vick**, 2. OT **Leonard Davis**); 2000 (1. DE **Courtney Brown**, 2. LB **LaVar Arrington**).



WILD WEEKEND Ron Borges

Seahawks show NFL parody, not parity

There is really only one thing you can say about wild-card weekend, and you didn't have to wait until Sunday night to say it.

"That's why they play the games," David once announced after dropping Goliath with a slingshot to the eye. His point was never made clearer than during Saturday's playoff win by the Seahawks.

The Seahawks staggered into the post-season with a 7-9 record, making them the first team to reach the playoffs with a losing record in a non-strike year since the advent of the Super Bowl. They lost seven of their final 10 games, yet rang up 41 points on the defending Super Bowl champions, knocking the 11-5 Saints out of the postseason.

How did the Seahawks smoke the Saints' defense and, to a lesser extent, how did this year's more vulnerable version of the Jets' defense shut down Peyton Manning in the midst of a month of on-field struggles and seemingly endless off-the-field theatre?

Call it parity if you want. That's what the NFL would like you to do. Repeat the "On Any Given Sunday" mantra that dates back to Bert Bell and the 1940s and then go out and buy some merchandise and a

Sunday Ticket package and don't ask too many questions.

While you're gone, though, I'll call it something else. I'll call it parody. A parody of what once made the NFL the greatest team sport America ever came up with. A parody of that greatness.

There are no great teams this season, and that includes the ones that went 14-2 or 13-3. All are seriously flawed, although the one with Tom Brady in charge is less flawed than the rest because he is The Great Equalizer. Like a parish priest, he can absolve his team of its many sins.

That's why the Patriots have the best chance to go all the way to Dallas even though their defense is one of the shakiest in the NFL, which is not the traditional formula for playoff success.

So what happened that first day of the playoffs, and what does it say about the NFL? What happened was two flawed teams beat two nearly equally flawed teams. The Seahawks did it in a way that was a tad embarrassing, staggering to a division title and hosting a game when most believed they didn't deserve to be in the playoffs. But they got the "W" and move on.

The Jets did it by returning to their

roots, which head coach Rex Ryan always has claimed was ground-and-pound football. After falling behind in the first half, that's what he demanded of his players in the second half, pounding the Colts' defense down with a hard-headed running game and pounding down the Colts' offense with a defense that dared them to run the ball.

Manning took the dare and lost the bet. That was Ryan's plan, and it worked.

But just as last week was Wild-Card Weekend, this is usually Reality Check Weekend. In recent years, the wild-card games have offered an upset or two, but the following weekend midnight usually strikes down Cinderella. Is that where the Seahawks and Jets are headed when they face the Bears and Patriots?

We don't know, of course. That's why they play the games. Just ask the heavily favored Saints.

But the NFL should hope so, because if the 7-9 Seahawks reach the Super Bowl, these playoffs will have become more than a parody. They will have become a farce.

Ron Borges is a columnist for the Boston Herald.

HANDICAPPER'S CORNER

DIVISIONAL ROUND

Early pointspreads as of Sunday, Jan. 9

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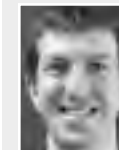
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PFW
consensus

EARLY LAS VEGAS LINE

 Home team in caps. Asterisk (*) denotes team will cover pointspread but lose game.

PITTSBURGH -3 vs. Baltimore (37)	Pittsburgh	Pittsburgh	Pittsburgh	Baltimore	Baltimore	Pittsburgh	Baltimore	Pittsburgh	Pittsburgh	Pittsburgh
ATLANTA -1½ vs. Green Bay (45½)	Green Bay	Green Bay	Atlanta	Green Bay	Green Bay	Atlanta	Atlanta	Green Bay	Green Bay	Green Bay
CHICAGO -9½ vs. Seattle (40)	Seattle*	Chicago	Chicago	Chicago	Chicago	Chicago	Seattle*	Chicago	Seattle*	Chicago
NEW ENGLAND -8½ vs. N.Y. Jets (45½)	New England	N.Y. Jets*	N.Y. Jets*	N.Y. Jets*	N.Y. Jets*	N.Y. Jets*	New England	N.Y. Jets*	New England	N.Y. Jets*
Last week vs. spread	2-1	1-2	1-2	3-0	2-1	2-1	2-1	1-2	3-0	2-1
Season to date vs. spread	120-129-10	127-122-10	135-114-10	138-111-10	124-125-10	135-114-10	129-120-10	123-126-10	135-114-10	123-126-10
Season to date best bets	29-21-1	22-28-1	25-25-1	32-18-1	29-21-1	26-24-1	28-22-1	25-25-1	26-24-1	37-27-4
Last week straight-up	2-2	1-3	1-3	3-1	2-2	2-2	2-2	1-3	3-1	2-2
Season to date straight-up	162-98	162-98	164-96	163-97	155-105	152-108	165-95	163-97	170-90	160-100
Editor's note: There was no early line for the Saints-Seahawks wild-card game.										

DIVISIONAL-ROUND OPPONENTS VS. SPREAD

 H – home, A – away, N – neutral, followed by team's score; number in parentheses is number of points by which that team was favored to win; E – game was rated as even; W – beat the pointspread; * – team beat the pointspread in both regular-season meetings that year; T – neither beat the pointspread; P – playoff game; OT – overtime; # – at Toronto

MATCHUP	2009	2008	MATCHUP	2009	2008
Baltimore at Pittsburgh	A-20 H-23(-3)T	H-20(-7½) A-17W	Seattle at Chicago	H-19 A-25(-2½)W	Did not play
Green Bay at Atlanta	Did not play	H-24(-5) A-27W	N.Y. Jets at New England	A-14 H-31(-11)W	A-34W H-10 A-19(-1)W

10-YEAR SERIES RECORDS

Baltimore at PITTSBURGH	(13-9)(9-3)(5-6-1)
Green Bay at ATLANTA	(3-2)(0-1)(0-1)
Seattle at CHICAGO	(3-2)(2-0)(1-1)
N.Y. Jets at NEW ENGLAND	(14-7)(6-5)(4-6-1)

Series leader is listed in CAPS with its record listed first, followed by series leader's record at this week's game site, followed by series leader's record vs. pointspread at this week's site. This year's games not included.

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VEGAS DREAMING Mike Wilkening

Clash of strong trends in Seahawks-Bears matchup

Handicappers who know their history might have given the Seahawks the benefit of the doubt in the wild-card round. The divisional round, however, might be another story.

The Saints, who were the biggest road favorites in wild-card history and the biggest playoff road favorites of any kind in at least 32 years, started fast at Seattle by grabbing a 10-0 lead, no doubt putting their backers, who had laid between 10 and 10.5 points in most instances, at some ease. All the Saints had to do was slightly outplay a team they had dominated early — a 7-9 team, mind you — and the cover was in plain sight. And what a stylish tally that would have been for any handicapper, for we do not see giant road favorites very often, let alone in the playoffs.

But as the Saints found out, shaking a home team that suddenly finds its best form and earns the backing of a boisterous crowd can be tough. The Seahawks rallied for a 41-36 victory, and Saints supporters were left to see what they missed in their study of Seattle.

All home underdogs aren't slam dunks in Round One, of course, as the Chiefs reminded us. But they have been a good bet in recent times. Since 1990, home underdogs now have an 8-5 record against the spread in the wild-card round, including seven outright upsets. (All pointspread data used for the historical trends herein are from the annual logs published by Jim Feist.)

Now, handicappers are left to figure whether the Seahawks can pull another surprise. Seattle, a 9.5-point underdog at Chicago on Sunday, has covered in two of their last three appearances in the divisional round since 2005. However, home underdogs who have sprung upsets in the wild-card round haven't fared particularly well in Round Two. In the past 20 years, they are 0-6 straight-up and against the spread in the divisional round, with every defeat coming by 10 points or more.

While that trend could pique the interest of Bears backers, the divisional round has been unkind to Chicago recently.

Since the Bears throttled the Giants 21-0 as nine-point favorites in 1985, Chicago has endured disappointment after disappointment in this round. It is 1-7 ATS in Round Two in the last 25 years, with only two straight-up wins. The Bears have not covered in the divisional round since the "Fog Bowl" of 1988, when they defeated the Eagles 20-12 as five-point favorites.

That is also their only home cover out of six games as a host in this round since '85.

While the Bears were able to survive and advance in 2006 with a 27-24 overtime victory vs. Seattle, they did not cover the nine-point spread. They were far less fortunate in their previous two games as the home team in the divisional round, falling 29-21 to Carolina as three-point favorites in 2005 and 33-19 to the Eagles as three-point favorites in 2001.

The Seahawks and Bears are meeting for the second time this season, as are the Packers and Falcons, who square off in Atlanta Saturday night. The Seahawks won in Chicago in October, with the Falcons beating visiting Green Bay in November.

AFC DIVISIONAL REMATCHES WILL INTRIGUE

Both AFC divisional-round games feature opponents that will be meeting for the third time. On Saturday, the Ravens try to beat the rival Steelers in Pittsburgh for the second time this season. The following day, the top-seeded Patriots host the Jets, their primary AFC East foil.

Since 1990, divisional foes have met 12 times in this round, with favorites covering six times, underdogs covering four times and one push. (The 1997 Broncos-Chiefs divisional-round matchup, captured by Denver, was a pick-'em.) However, underdogs have captured the last two matchups pitting divisional foes in this round. In 2008, the Eagles defeated the host Giants 23-11 as four-point underdogs. The previous year, it was the Giants who sprung the upset, notching a 21-17 win in Dallas, which was a seven-point favorite.

The AFC divisional matchups present handicappers with a chance to do some serious homework — and a chance to show off, if you will. I look at it this way: The Steelers and Ravens are playing for the eighth time in three seasons, and both teams have not changed all that much in that span. By that same token, the Jets and Patriots know each other very well, too.

Those who can pick the ATS winners in these contests would be forgiven for feeling an extra twinge of pride or two. These are no ordinary divisional-round matchups. These rivalries have helped define the AFC in recent seasons, and the winners have to believe they have the stuff to win the Super Bowl.

If you think that's compelling, think of how exciting the AFC title game could be.

Mike Wilkening is PFW's handicapping columnist. Read his weekly picks column as well as other handicapping features at ProFootballWeekly.com. He can be reached at mwilkening@pfwmedia.com.

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DIVISIONAL PLAYOFF PREVIEW



When the Ravens have the ball

How well the Ravens protect QB Joe Flacco — and how well Flacco handles the Steelers' pass rush — are issues to watch. One of the few disappointments in the Ravens' 30-7 win at Kansas City in the wild-card round was that the Chiefs sacked Flacco four times, with star OLB Tamba Hali notching a pair of sacks.

In the Week 13 loss to Pittsburgh, Flacco was sacked four times, most notably when SS Troy Polamalu burst off left edge and hit him on a three-step drop, forcing the fumble that changed the game. The Steelers are capable of generating a pass rush multiple ways, whether it's OLBs James Harrison and LaMarr Woodley crashing off the edge or any variety of blitzes drawn up by defensive coordinator Dick LeBeau, who figures to test the Ravens' pass protection.

Flacco was sharp against the Chiefs, completing 25-of-34 passes for 265 yards with two TDs. The Ravens had great success attacking with shorter throws, with TE Todd Heap (10 catches, 108 yards) having a field day. The Ravens also got WR Anquan Boldin more involved after a quiet end to the regular season. Short passes figure to be the Ravens' bread and butter against a Steelers defense adept at taking away the deep routes.

The Ravens could struggle to establish the ground game against the Steelers' No. 1 run defense, but RB Ray Rice can affect the game regardless. He's an excellent pass catcher who gave the Steelers fits in the first meeting in '09 but has been bottled up since then.

RAVENS DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE

WR 85 Mason / 18 Stallworth / 16 D. Reed*
 OLT 74 Oher / 64 Cousins
 OLG 66 Grubbs / 65 Chester
 C 77 Birk / 65 Chester
 ORG 65 Chester / 79 Moll
 ORT 73 Yanda / 64 Cousins / 79 Moll
 TE 86 Heap / 83 Dickson* / 88 Pitta* / 80 Drew
 WR 81 Boldin / 84 Houshmandzadeh / 11 M. Smith
 QB 5 Flacco / 10 Bulger
 RB 27 Rice / 23 McGahee / 34 Parmele
 FB 33 L. McClain / 38 McKie

DEFENSE

DT 92 Ngata / 61 A. Jones* / 96 Divens
 NT 97 Gregg / 62 Cody* / 91 McKinney
 DE 93 Redding / 99 Kruger
 RUSH 55 Suggs / 51 Ayanbadejo
 WILL 53 J. McClain / 59 Ellerbe
 MIKE 52 Lewis / 56 Gooden / 58 Phillips
 SAM 95 Johnson / 54 Burgess
 LCB 25 Carr / 21 Webb
 RCB 37 Wilson / 31 Washington / 29 Williams
 SS 26 Landry / 43 Nakamura
 FS 20 E. Reed / 28 Zbikowski

SPECIALISTS

P 4 Koch
 PK 7 Cundiff
 H 4 Koch
 PR 21 Webb / 28 Zbikowski / 25 Carr / 20 E. Reed
 KR 16 D. Reed* / 37 Wilson / 34 Parmele
 LS 70 Houser

* Rookie



RAVENS AT STEELERS



Saturday, Jan. 15, 2011 — 4:30 p.m. ET

LOCATION Heinz Field TURF Grass MEETING OF THE YEAR Third

OVERVIEW

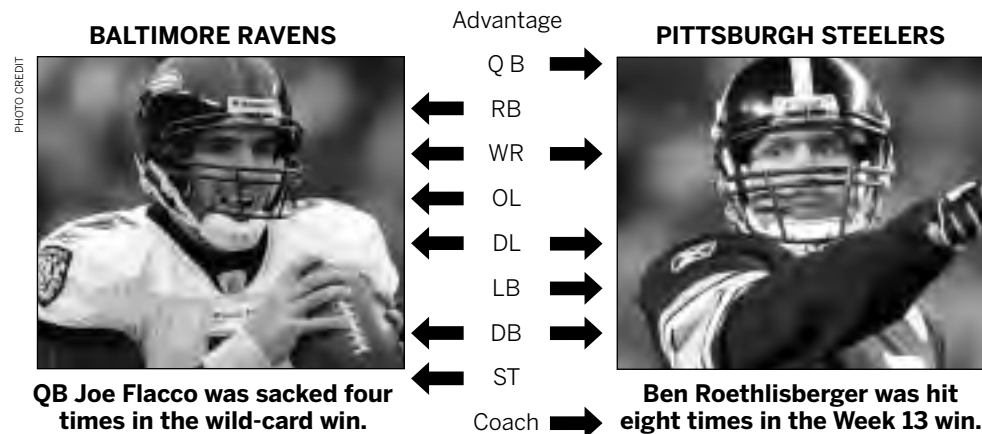
This has been one of the NFL's more compelling, competitive and physical rivalries in recent years.

The Ravens and Steelers, who are meeting in the postseason for the second time in three seasons, have split a pair of games this season. Since 2008, six of the last seven meetings have been settled by four points or fewer. The last four games have been settled by a field goal each time.

Both teams have engineered a fourth-

quarter comeback to beat the other this season. In Week Four, Ravens QB Joe Flacco, who is coming off his finest playoff performance in the rout of Kansas City on Sunday, coolly led the Ravens on a 40-yard drive in the final moments and threw the game-winning TD pass. In Week 13, Steelers SS Troy Polamalu provided the heroics, hitting Flacco and forcing a fumble. OLB LaMarr Woodley recovered, setting up the eventual game-winning TD.

THE MATCHUPS



13-4-0	Season record	12-4-0
9-7-1	Season record vs. spread	10-6-0
6-3-0	Home/road record	5-3-0
6-2-1	Home/road record vs. spread	5-3-0
5-0-0	Record on natural turf	9-3-0
5-0-0	Record on natural turf vs. spread	8-4-0

RAVENS SCHEDULE

Pointspread Refers to Baltimore

DATE	OPPONENT	SPREAD	SCORE
Sept. 13	At New York Jets	(+1)	10-9
Sept. 19	At Cincinnati	(-3)	10-15
Sept. 26	Cleveland	(-13)	24-17
Oct. 3	At Pittsburgh	(+2.5)	17-14
Oct. 10	Denver	(-8.5)	31-17
Oct. 17	At New England	(+3)	20-23*
Oct. 24	Buffalo	(-12.5)	37-34*
Oct. 31	BYE		
Nov. 7	Miami	(-5.5)	26-10
Nov. 11	At Atlanta	(+1)	21-26
Nov. 21	At Carolina	(-13)	37-13
Nov. 28	Tampa Bay	(-7.5)	17-10
Dec. 5	Pittsburgh	(-3)	10-13
Dec. 13	At Houston	(-3)	34-28*
Dec. 19	New Orleans	(-2)	30-24
Dec. 26	At Cleveland	(-3.5)	20-10
Jan. 2	Cincinnati	(-9.5)	13-7

POSTSEASON

Jan. 9 At Kansas City (-3) 30-7

Jan. 15 At Pittsburgh

* Overtime

STEELERS SCHEDULE

Pointspread Refers to Pittsburgh

DATE	OPPONENT	SPREAD	SCORE
Sept. 12	Atlanta	(+1.5)	15-9*
Sept. 19	At Tennessee	(+6)	19-11
Sept. 26	At Tampa Bay	(-2.5)	38-13
Oct. 3	Baltimore	(-2.5)	14-17
Oct. 10	BYE		
Oct. 17	Cleveland	(-14)	28-10
Oct. 24	At Miami	(-3)	23-22
Oct. 31	At New Orleans	(+2)	10-20
Nov. 8	At Cincinnati	(-4.5)	27-21
Nov. 14	New England	(-4.5)	26-39
Nov. 21	Oakland	(-7)	35-3
Nov. 28	At Buffalo	(-6.5)	19-16*
Dec. 5	At Baltimore	(+3)	13-10
Dec. 12	Cincinnati	(-8)	23-7
Dec. 19	New York Jets	(-3.5)	17-22
Dec. 23	Carolina	(-14)	27-3
Jan. 2	At Cleveland	(-6.5)	41-9

POSTSEASON

Jan. 15 Baltimore

* Overtime

When the Steelers have the ball

While this has been a competitive series in recent years, there's no question that the Steelers have had the upper hand when QB Ben Roethlisberger has been in the lineup. He has won his last six starts against Baltimore since 2007. The Ravens' last three victories against Pittsburgh, including the Week Four triumph at Heinz Field, came when Roethlisberger did not play.

In Pittsburgh's win at Baltimore in December, Roethlisberger played with an injured foot throughout and with a broken nose suffered in the first quarter. Despite those handicaps, he hung in to throw for 253 yards with a TD and interception. He was under pressure throughout the game, with the Ravens credited with eight QB hits and three sacks. The Steelers struggled to block OLB Terrell Suggs, who had five QB hits and 1.5 sacks on Roethlisberger. The Steelers have also had issues stopping DT Haloti Ngata, who had 15 tackles and 1.5 sacks in the first two meetings.

Of course, even if Roethlisberger is under pressure, he is capable of buying just enough time for his receivers to work open. His top target, WR Mike Wallace, has outstanding speed and has become a more well-rounded player, dangerous on shorter routes as well as the deep routes.

The Ravens have shut down the Steelers' running game this season, holding RB Rashard Mendenhall to 2.8 yards per carry on 44 carries. However, the Ravens gave up 82 yards on just nine carries to the Chiefs' Jamaal Charles last week.

STEELERS DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE

WR 86 Ward / 82 Randle El / 84 Brown*
 OLT 72 J. Scott / 66 Hills
 OLG 68 Kemoeatu / 79 Essex
 C 53 Pouncey* / 64 Legursky
 ORG 73 Foster / 79 Essex
 ORT 71 Adams / 61 C. Scott*
 TE 83 Miller / 89 Spaeth / 85 Johnson
 WR 17 Wallace / 81 Battle / 88 Sanders
 QB 7 Roethlisberger / 4 Leftwich / 16 Batch
 RB 34 Mendenhall / 21 Moore / 33 Redman / 27 Dwyer*
 FB 85 Johnson

DEFENSE

DLE 96 Hood / 91 A. Smith
 NT 98 Hampton / 76 Hoke / 69 McLendon
 DRE 99 Keisel / 93 Eason
 LOLB 56 Woodley / 97 Worilds*
 LILB 51 Farris / 57 Fox
 RILB 94 Timmons / 50 Foote / 55 Sylvester*
 ROLB 92 Harrison / 97 Worilds*
 LCB 20 McFadden / 37 Madison / 23 Lewis
 RCB 24 Taylor / 22 Gay / 28 Butler*
 SS 43 Polamalu / 26 Allen
 FS 25 Clark / 29 Mundy

SPECIALISTS

P 13 Kapinos
 PK 6 Suisham
 H 13 Kapinos / 82 Randle El
 PR 84 Brown* / 82 Randle El / 21 Moore
 KR 84 Brown* / 88 Sanders* / 21 Moore
 LS 60 Warren / 72 J. Scott / 92 Harrison

* Rookie

DIVISIONAL PLAYOFF PREVIEW

When the Packers have the ball

QB Aaron Rodgers won his first playoff game last week and played well, throwing three touchdown passes and no interceptions. It was the Packers' balance on offense — which is something they lacked for much of the season and especially against the Falcons in their meeting earlier this season — that stood out, though.

Rookie RB James Starks ran for more yards than any Packers back did during the regular season, rushing 23 times for 123 yards against Philadelphia. The Falcons held Green Bay's backs to 26 yards on 11 carries when they met in Week 12, and Rodgers gained 51 of the team's 77 rushing yards in the game.

Rodgers and the receivers give the offense plenty of torque on their own, but if Starks stays hot, they're even more formidable. The Packers have enough weapons to spread the field with three- and four-receiver sets, and the Falcons will respond by putting their nickel package on the field, which means an extra corner plays instead of a linebacker. With Atlanta's secondary preoccupied with WRs Greg Jennings (5-119-0 receiving in Week 12), Donald Driver, James Jones and Jordy Nelson, the Falcons will be guarding against getting beat deep, and could be vulnerable to getting gashed by the ground game.

The Falcons are well aware that Rodgers can make plays with his legs and his arm, so DEs John Abraham, who made 13 sacks in the regular season, and Kroy Biermann will need to be disciplined and avoid breaking contain.

PACKERS DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE

WR 85 Jennings / 87 Nelson / 16 Swain
 OLT 76 Clifton / 75 Bulaga* / 62 Dietrich-Smith
 OLG 73 Colledge / 70 Lang
 C 63 Wells / 72 Spitz / 67 McDonald*
 ORG 71 Sifton / 70 Lang / 67 McDonald*
 ORT 75 Bulaga* / 70 Lang
 TE 81 Quarless* / 83 Crabtree* / 86 D. Lee
 WR 80 Driver / 89 J. Jones / 16 Swain
 QB 12 Rodgers / 10 Flynn / 6 G. Harrell
 RB 32 Jackson / 23 Nance* / 44 Starks*
 FB 35 Hall / 30 Kuhn / 45 Johnson

DEFENSE

DLE 79 Pickett / 98 Wilson* / 94 Wynn
 NT 90 Raji / 79 Pickett / 95 Green
 DRE 77 Jenkins / 95 Green
 LOLB 52 Matthews / 93 Walden
 BLB 50 Hawk / 57 Wilhelm
 MLB 55 Bishop / 49 Francois
 ROLB 58 Zombo* / 93 Walden / 53 Briggs
 LCB 21 Woodson / 37 Shields* / 28 Underwood
 RCB 38 T. Williams / 22 P. Lee / 40 Gordy*
 SS 46 Peprah / 20 Bigby / 24 Bush
 FS 36 Collins / 24 Bush

SPECIALISTS

P 8 Masthay
 PK 2 Crosby / 8 Masthay
 H 8 Masthay / 10 Flynn
 PR 38 T. Williams / 85 Jennings / 87 Nelson
 KR 37 Shields* / 87 Nelson / 22 Lee
 LS 61 Goode / 71 Sifton

* Rookie



PACKERS AT FALCONS



Saturday, Jan. 15, 2011 — 8 p.m. ET

LOCATION Georgia Dome TURF FieldTurf MEETING OF THE YEAR Second

OVERVIEW



The Packers will get a chance to avenge their Nov. 28 loss to the Falcons at the Georgia Dome with a trip to the NFC championship game on the line.

While Atlanta rested up with a first-round bye last week, Green Bay went on the road and held off the Eagles. The Packers are battle-tested — they have played four consecutive games in playoff-like conditions, winning three of them. The Falcons earned the No. 1 seed in the

NFC when they beat the lowly Panthers in Week 17, but they lost to the Saints at home the week before.

Green Bay learned just how difficult it is to beat QB Matt Ryan at the Georgia Dome — he has lost twice there since entering the league in 2008 — in Week 12. The Packers never led in the game, but it was tight throughout and the Falcons won on a 47-yard field goal by PK Matt Bryant in the final seconds.

THE MATCHUPS

GREEN BAY PACKERS	Advantage	ATLANTA FALCONS
	← QB	
	RB →	
	← WR	
	← OL	
	← DL	
	← LB	
	← DB	
	ST →	
	Coach →	

Clay Matthews was quiet in his last game against Atlanta.
Michael Turner's powerful running can wear down Green Bay.

11-6-0	Season record	13-3-0
10-7-0	Season record vs. spread	11-5-0
4-5-0	Home/road record	7-1-0
5-4-0	Home/road record vs. spread	5-3-0
2-3-0	Record on artificial turf	10-1-0
3-2-0	Record on artificial turf vs. spread	8-3-0

PACKERS SCHEDULE

Pointspread Refers to Green Bay

DATE	OPPONENT	SPREAD	SCORE
Sept. 12	At Philadelphia	(-3)	27-20
Sept. 19	Buffalo	(-12.5)	34-7
Sept. 27	At Chicago	(-3)	17-20
Oct. 3	Detroit	(-14.5)	28-26
Oct. 10	At Washington	(-3)	13-16*
Oct. 17	Miami	(-3)	20-23*
Oct. 24	Minnesota	(-3)	28-24
Oct. 31	At New York Jets	(+6)	9-0
Nov. 7	Dallas	(-7.5)	45-7
Nov. 14	BYE		
Nov. 21	At Minnesota	(-3)	31-3
Nov. 28	At Atlanta	(+2.5)	17-20
Dec. 5	San Francisco	(-8.5)	34-16
Dec. 12	At Detroit	(-7)	3-7
Dec. 19	At New England	(+14)	27-31
Dec. 26	New York Giants	(-3)	45-17
Jan. 2	Chicago	(-11.5)	10-3

POSTSEASON

Jan. 9 At Philadelphia (+1.5) 21-16

Jan. 15 At Atlanta

* Overtime

FALCONS SCHEDULE

Pointspread Refers to Atlanta

DATE	OPPONENT	SPREAD	SCORE
Sept. 12	At Pittsburgh	(-1.5)	9-15*
Sept. 19	Arizona	(-7)	41-7
Sept. 26	At New Orleans	(+3)	27-24*
Oct. 3	San Francisco	(-7)	16-14
Oct. 10	At Cleveland	(-3)	20-10
Oct. 17	At Philadelphia	(+2.5)	17-31
Oct. 24	Cincinnati	(-3.5)	39-32
Oct. 31	BYE		
Nov. 7	Tampa Bay	(-10)	27-21
Nov. 14	Baltimore	(-1)	26-21
Nov. 21	At St. Louis	(-3)	34-17
Nov. 28	Green Bay	(-2.5)	20-17
Dec. 5	At Tampa Bay	(-3)	28-24
Dec. 12	At Carolina	(-7)	31-10
Dec. 19	At Seattle	(-5.5)	34-18
Dec. 27	New Orleans	(-2)	14-17
Jan. 2	Carolina	(-14)	31-10

POSTSEASON

Jan. 15 Green Bay

* Overtime

When the Falcons have the ball

QB Matt Ryan took what the Packers' "D" gave him last time, dinking and dunking to keep the chains moving. He was efficient down the stretch and completed 14 second-half throws in a row before tossing his last pass out of bounds as the pass rush drew near. Ryan was helped by a typically strong effort from RB Michael Turner, who rushed for 110 yards and a touchdown.

Green Bay avoided giving up long gains in that battle — Ryan didn't complete a pass of longer than 21 yards — but the slow bleed of short completions hurt, as did the team's failure to force any turnovers.

Ryan is only in his third year, but he's poised in the pocket, and rattling him will be difficult. Despite that, Packers defensive coordinator Dom Capers will probably come after Ryan with blitzes.

A key matchup will be OLB Clay Matthews vs. the Falcons' pass protection. Matthews was dealing with a shin injury against Atlanta in Week 12, and ORT Tyson Clabo held Matthews without a sack. Green Bay could use more production from a healthier Matthews (one sack last week) this time.

Capers trusts his talented secondary to hold up in coverage, and if Ryan does make a mistake in his second career postseason appearance, CB Charles Woodson, FS Nick Collins and CB Tramont Williams are very capable of picking him off.

The Falcons' offense could stall if it is put in predictable passing situations and the Packers keep WR Roddy White and TE Tony Gonzalez well covered.

FALCONS DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE

WR 84 White / 83 Douglas
 OLT 72 Baker / 74 Svitek
 OLG 63 Blalock / 79 M. Johnson*
 C 62 McClure / 61 Hawley*
 ORG 73 Dahl / 79 M. Johnson*
 ORT 77 Clabo / 75 Reynolds
 TE 88 Gonzalez / 87 Peelle / 81 Palmer
 WR 12 Jenkins / 14 Weems / 86 Finneran
 QB 2 Ryan / 8 Redman / 4 Wilson
 RB 33 Turner / 44 Snelling / 35 Smith
 FB 34 Mughelli

DEFENSE

DLE 71 Biermann / 98 Anderson / 92 Davis
 NT 91 Peters* / 94 Jerry / 99 Walker
 UT 95 Babineaux / 97 Lewis
 DRE 55 Abraham / 90 Sidbury
 SLB 54 Nicholas / 56 Weatherspoon*
 MLB 50 Lofton / 52 Wire
 WLB 53 Peterson / 59 Adkins
 LCB 20 Grimes / 29 Williams
 RCB 23 Robinson / 21 Owens / 24 Franks*
 SS 25 Moore / 26 Coleman
 FS 28 DeCoud / 36 Bush

SPECIALISTS

P 9 Koenen
 PK 3 Bryant
 H 9 Koenen
 PR 14 Weems / 83 Douglas
 KR 14 Weems / 24 Franks*
 LS 82 Zelenka

* Rookie

DIVISIONAL PLAYOFF PREVIEW

When the Seahawks have the ball

QB Matt Hasselbeck aggressively pecked away at the Saints' undermanned defense last Saturday, effectively utilizing eight different receivers.

In addition to burning the Saints on the perimeter with WR Mike Williams (five catches for 68 yards, including a 38-yard TD), Hasselbeck had great success connecting with TE John Carlson underneath (two TD catches) and WR Brandon Stokley in the slot (four catches for 73 yards, including what proved to be the go-ahead TD late in the second quarter).

The Bears' secondary no doubt will be particularly focused on Williams after the headaches he caused them in Week Six, but they have to be very careful not to ignore the other targets Hasselbeck has at his disposal, including RBs Marshawn Lynch (19-131-1 rushing last week) and Justin Forsett (10-67-1 rushing in Week Six).

Chicago also must apply a lot more pressure against Hasselbeck in this game, after failing to register a sack in the first game, and not allow the dangerous Lynch, who showed his break-away ability last week on one of the flashier runs in playoff history, to get a head of steam.

It should help that Pro Bowl WLB Lance Briggs will be on the field after missing the previous meeting with a left ankle injury.

Seahawks rookie OLT Russell Okung had his best game of the season in Week Six, matched up against Bears DRE Julius Peppers, and will need another strong effort this Sunday both run-blocking and pass-blocking.

SEAHAWKS DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE

WR 87 Obomanu / 15 Stokley / 82 Martin
 OLT 76 Okung* / 78 Polumbus / 68 Giacomin
 OLG 78 Polumbus / 64 Gibson / 61 Jeanpierre
 C 65 Spencer / 63 White
 ORG 64 Gibson / 77 Andrews / 66 Fanaika
 ORT 75 Locklear / 78 Polumbus / 73 Robinson
 TE 89 Carlson / 88 Morrah / 86 Baker
 WR 17 Williams / 81 Tate*
 QB 8 Hasselbeck / 6 Whitehurst / 7 Losman
 RB 24 Lynch / 20 Forsett / 33 Washington
 FB 26 M. Robinson

DEFENSE

DLE 91 Clemons / 98 Brock / 58 Davis*
 DLT 92 Mebane / 93 Terrill
 DRT 90 Cole / 97 Gordon
 DRE 95 Balmer / 99 Richardson
 OLB 57 Hawthorne / 54 Herring / 55 Pawelek*
 MLB 51 Tatum / 57 Hawthorne
 OLB 59 Curry / 52 McCoy
 LCB 23 Trufant / 28 Thurmond* / 39 Cox
 RCB 21 Jennings / 32 Brown* / 22 Pinkard
 SS 36 Milloy / 31 Chancellor*
 FS 29 Thomas* / 27 Babineaux

SPECIALISTS

P 9 Ryan
 PK 10 Mare
 H 9 Ryan / 8 Hasselbeck
 PR 33 Washington / 20 Forsett / 81 Tate*
 KR 33 Washington / 20 Forsett / 81 Tate*
 LS 49 Gresham*

* Rookie



SEAHAWKS AT BEARS



Sunday, Jan. 16, 2011 — 1 p.m. ET

LOCATION Soldier Field TURF Grass MEETING OF THE YEAR Second

OVERVIEW



After pulling off one of the more improbable postseason upsets in league history against a Saints team that entered the game with a host of key players nursing injuries, the Seahawks will be facing one of the league's healthier teams all season in the Bears, who will be benefiting from a week off to boot.

The Seahawks couldn't have asked for more from veteran QB Matt Hasselbeck, who played one of the better games of his

career against the Saints after having all kinds of problems down the stretch of the regular season.

Seattle did a number on the Bears at Soldier Field earlier this season in a 23-20 victory in Week Six that featured a huge day by WR Mike Williams (10 catches for 123 yards) and six sacks of Bears QB Jay Cutler by the Seahawks' defense, with 4.5 of them coming from blitzing defensive backs.

THE MATCHUPS

	Advantage	
SEATTLE SEAHAWKS		CHICAGO BEARS
	QB →	
	RB →	
← WR →		
← OL →		
	DL →	
	LB →	
	DB →	
← ST →		
	Coach →	

Marshawn Lynch is coming off his first 100-yard game of '10.

Matt Forté has been effective the second half of the season.

8-9-0	Season record	11-5-0
8-9-0	Season record vs. spread	9-6-1
2-6-0	Home/road record	5-3-0
2-6-0	Home/road record vs. spread	4-4-0
2-4-0	Record on natural turf	8-4-0
2-4-0	Record on natural turf vs. spread	8-4-0

SEAHAWKS SCHEDULE

Pointspread Refers to Seattle

DATE	OPPONENT	SPREAD	SCORE
Sept. 12	San Francisco	(+3)	31-6
Sept. 19	At Denver	(+3.5)	14-31
Sept. 26	San Diego	(+3.5)	27-20
Oct. 3	At St. Louis	(-2.5)	3-20
Oct. 10	BYE		
Oct. 17	At Chicago	(+6)	23-20
Oct. 24	Arizona	(-6.5)	22-10
Oct. 31	At Oakland	(+1.5)	3-33
Nov. 7	New York Giants	(+7)	7-41
Nov. 14	At Arizona	(+3.5)	36-18
Nov. 21	At New Orleans	(+11)	19-34
Nov. 28	Kansas City	(+1.5)	24-42
Dec. 5	Carolina	(-4.5)	31-14
Dec. 12	At San Francisco	(+4.5)	21-40
Dec. 19	Atlanta	(+5.5)	18-34
Dec. 26	At Tampa Bay	(+5.5)	15-38
Jan. 2	St. Louis	(+3)	16-6

POSTSEASON

Jan. 8 New Orleans (+10) 41-36

Jan. 16 At Chicago

* Overtime

BEARS SCHEDULE

Pointspread Refers to Chicago

DATE	OPPONENT	SPREAD	SCORE
Sept. 12	Detroit	(-6.5)	19-14
Sept. 19	At Dallas	(+7)	27-20
Sept. 27	Green Bay	(+3)	20-17
Oct. 3	At N.Y. Giants	(+3.5)	3-17
Oct. 10	At Carolina	(+3)	23-6
Oct. 17	Seattle	(-6)	20-23
Oct. 24	Washington	(-3)	14-17
Oct. 31	BYE		
Nov. 7	At Buffalo	(-3)	22-19
Nov. 14	Minnesota	(+1)	27-13
Nov. 18	At Miami	(+2)	16-0
Nov. 28	Philadelphia	(+3)	31-26
Dec. 5	At Detroit	(-5)	24-20
Dec. 12	New England	(+3)	7-36
Dec. 20	At Minnesota	(-5.5)	40-14
Dec. 26	New York Jets	(-3)	38-34
Jan. 2	At Green Bay	(+11.5)	3-10

POSTSEASON

Jan. 16 Seattle

When the Bears have the ball

The key to success for the Bears will be to establish a balanced attack early, with RB Matt Forté, who just kept getting better as the season wore on, steadily moving the chains and QB Jay Cutler content to take what the Seahawks' defense gives him instead of forcing the issue.

If the offense remains patient, deep shots downfield should develop against a very vulnerable Seahawks pass defense that allowed Drew Brees to complete 39 passes for 404 yards last week.

Look for Bears WRs Johnny Knox (5-120 receiving in Week Six) and Devin Hester to have at least a few big-play opportunities against Seahawks CBs Marcus Trufant and Kelly Jennings.

It's also imperative that the Bears' offensive line does a much better job recognizing Seattle's tricky blitz packages than it did in Week Six.

The line must pay particular attention to DE Raheem Brock (nine sacks in '10), who has been a major force the past two games teaming up with DE Chris Clemons (11 sacks). Brock had the only sack of Brees last week, a forced fumble and two tackles for loss after collecting 2.5 sacks the previous week against the Rams.

The Seahawks' "D" did a tremendous job of finishing its plays and swarming to the ball against the Saints. Check the status of MLB Lofa Tatum, the defense's wily traffic cop who suffered a concussion late in the Saints game. OLB David Hawthorne (team-leading nine tackles and a fumble recovery vs. the Saints) will be a key defender against Forté.

BEARS DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE

WR 13 Knox / 80 Bennett / 81 R. Davis
 OLT 68 Omiyale / 78 Shaffer / 73 Webb*
 OLG 74 C. Williams / 70 E. Williams
 C 57 Kreutz / 70 E. Williams
 ORG 63 Garza / 70 E. Williams / 60 Louis
 ORT 73 Webb* / 78 Shaffer / 67 Johnson
 TE 82 Olsen / 87 K. Davis
 WR 23 Hester / 19 Aromashodu
 QB 6 Cutler / 12 Hanie / 10 Collins
 RB 22 Forté / 29 Taylor / 32 Bell / 25 Wolfe
 H-B 86 Manumaleuna / 88 Clark

DEFENSE

DLE 71 Idonije / 98 Wootton*
 DLT 75 Toeaina / 91 T. Harris / 69 Melton
 NT 95 Adams / 99 Harrison
 DRE 90 Peppers
 SLB 59 Tinoisamoa / 53 Roach
 MLB 54 Urlacher / 58 Wilson
 WLB 55 Briggs / 62 Iwuh
 LCB 26 Jennings / 35 Bowman / 31 J. Moore*
 RCB 33 Tillman / 30 D. Moore / 21 Graham
 SS 38 Manning / 36 Bullocks / 20 Steltz
 FS 46 C. Harris / 27 Wright*

SPECIALISTS

P 4 Maynard
 PK 9 Gould
 H 4 Maynard
 PR 23 Hester / 80 Bennett
 KR 23 Hester / 38 Manning / 13 Knox
 LS 65 Mannelly
 * Rookie

DIVISIONAL PLAYOFF PREVIEW

When the Jets have the ball

For the first 59:10 of their wild-card game vs. the Colts, Mark Sanchez was a caretaking QB whose main priority was to hand off to RBs LaDainian Tomlinson and Shonn Greene.

In the final 50 seconds, however, Sanchez proved he is capable of leading his team down the field when it matters most. He completed all three of his passes for 38 yards, putting PK Nick Folk in range to win the game with a 32-yard field goal as time expired.

If the Jets are going to knock off the top-seeded Patriots, Sanchez will need to be both a game manager and aggressive downfield thrower. The New York offense works best when L.T. and Greene are running well, setting up the play-action for Sanchez to throw downfield to WRs Santonio Holmes and Braylon Edwards.

The two-back approach worked well against Indy and might have some success vs. the Patriots, as well. Injuries on the New England defensive line will put some inexperienced players in the lineup, although DE Myron Pryor's return in Week 17 from a back injury provides some depth up front.

In the passing game, New England's defense will look to confuse Sanchez with multiple formations and unexpected blitzes. The second-year QB threw three picks in the team's Dec. 6 meeting, and Patriots head coach Bill Belichick has been known to unleash complex schemes during the playoffs.

An X-factor may be Jets WR Brad Smith, who can change the game as a "Wildcat" QB, throwing or running the ball out of the option.

JETS DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE

WR 10 Holmes / 89 Cotchery
 OLT 60 Ferguson / 78 Hunter
 OLG 68 Slauson / 62 Ducasse*
 C 74 Mangold / 75 R. Turner
 ORG 65 Moore / 75 R. Turner
 ORT 78 Hunter / 67 Woody
 TE 81 Keller / 84 Hartssock
 WR 17 Edwards / 16 Br. Smith
 QB 6 Sanchez / 8 Brunell / 11 Clemens
 RB 21 Tomlinson / 23 Greene / 25 McKnight*
 FB 49 Richardson / 38 Conner*

DEFENSE

DE 92 Ellis / 50 Gholston
 NT 91 Pouha / 93 Pryce / 71 Gilbert
 DT 70 Devito / 93 Kroul
 OLB 58 Thomas / 55 Westerman
 ILB 57 Scott / 56 Laury
 ILB 52 Harris
 OLB 99 J. Taylor / 97 Pace
 CB 24 Revis / 20 Wilson*
 CB 31 Cromartie / 30 Coleman
 FS 22 Pool / 27 Cook
 SS 21 Lowery / 33 E. Smith / 44 Ihedigbo

SPECIALISTS

P 9 Weatherford
 PK 2 Folk
 H 9 Weatherford
 PR 10 Holmes / 31 Cromartie
 KR 16 Br. Smith / 25 McKnight*
 LS 46 Purdum

* Rookie



JETS AT PATRIOTS



Sunday Jan. 16, 2011 — 4:30 p.m. ET

LOCATION Gillette Stadium TURF FieldTurf MEETING OF THE YEAR Third

OVERVIEW



The Jets and Patriots, two fierce and hated AFC East rivals, split their two regular-season meetings, with New York winning in Week Two and New England taking the Week 13 matchup.

Both teams protected their home field against each other. The Jets dominated the final 30 minutes of the first game, picking off Tom Brady twice in the second half to earn a 28-14 victory at the New Meadowlands. Three months later, it was

all Patriots, with Brady exacting revenge by throwing for 326 yards and four TDs in a 45-3 romp on "Monday Night Football."

The Jets aren't intimidated playing on the road in a hostile environment, having reached the AFC championship game last season as a wild card and having just knocked off the Colts in Indianapolis. Meanwhile the Patriots, in the playoffs for the eighth time in 10 years, were unbeaten at Gillette Stadium this season.

THE MATCHUPS

NEW YORK JETS	Advantage	NEW ENGLAND PATRIOTS
	QB →	
← RB	→	
← WR	→	
← OL →	→	
← DL →	→	
← LB →	→	
← DB	→	
← ST	→	
← Coach →	→	

LaDainian Tomlinson scored two TDs in the wild-card round. **Jerod Mayo was the leading tackler in the NFL this season.**

12-5-0	Season record	14-2-0
10-7-0	Season record vs. spread	10-5-1
7-2-0	Home/road record	8-0-0
6-3-0	Home/road record vs. spread	4-3-1
8-4-0	Record on artificial turf	10-1-0
6-6-0	Record on artificial turf vs. spread	6-4-1

JETS SCHEDULE

Points spread Refers to New York

DATE	OPPONENT	SPREAD	SCORE
Sept. 13	Baltimore	(-1)	9-10
Sept. 19	New England	(+3)	28-14
Sept. 26	At Miami	(+2.5)	31-23
Oct. 3	At Buffalo	(-5.5)	38-14
Oct. 11	Minnesota	(-4)	29-20
Oct. 17	At Denver	(-3.5)	24-20
Oct. 24	BYE		
Oct. 31	Green Bay	(-6)	0-9
Nov. 7	At Detroit	(-5.5)	23-20*
Nov. 14	At Cleveland	(-3.5)	26-20*
Nov. 21	Houston	(-6.5)	30-27
Nov. 25	Cincinnati	(-10)	26-10
Dec. 6	At New England	(+4)	3-45
Dec. 12	Miami	(-5)	6-10
Dec. 19	At Pittsburgh	(+3.5)	22-17
Dec. 26	At Chicago	(+3)	34-38
Jan. 2	Buffalo	(-1)	38-7

POSTSEASON

Jan. 8 At Indianapolis (+2) 17-16
 Jan. 16 At New England

* Overtime

PATRIOTS SCHEDULE

Points spread Refers to New England

DATE	OPPONENT	SPREAD	SCORE
Sept. 12	Cincinnati	(-5.5)	38-24
Sept. 19	At New York Jets	(-3)	14-28
Sept. 26	Buffalo	(-14)	38-30
Oct. 4	At Miami	(0)	41-14
Oct. 10	BYE		
Oct. 17	Baltimore	(-3)	23-20*
Oct. 24	At San Diego	(+2.5)	23-20
Oct. 31	Minnesota	(-5)	28-18
Nov. 7	At Cleveland	(-4)	14-34
Nov. 14	At Pittsburgh	(+4.5)	39-26
Nov. 21	Indianapolis	(-4.5)	31-28
Nov. 25	At Detroit	(-6)	45-24
Dec. 6	New York Jets	(-4)	45-3
Dec. 12	At Chicago	(-3)	36-7
Dec. 19	Green Bay	(-14)	31-27
Dec. 26	At Buffalo	(-7)	34-3
Jan. 2	Miami	(-4)	38-7

POSTSEASON

Jan. 16 N.Y. Jets

When the Patriots have the ball

As it has for the past decade in New England, the Pats' offense starts with No. 12. Tom Brady had perhaps his best season in 2010, throwing for 3,900 yards, 36 TDs and only four interceptions, and will be looking to eliminate the team he claimed he "hated" last August.

One of Brady's top games came on Dec. 6, when he toyed with Rex Ryan's blitzing "D" in a dominant performance, finishing with a passer rating of 148.9. New York defenders were often left rushing at Brady after he'd thrown the ball, as the QB connected with eight different receivers, with five of them gaining more than 11 yards per reception in the game.

The Jets' standard defensive attack is to bring pressure with multiple blitzes while playing man-to-man on the outside, but New York adjusted its scheme last week vs. the Colts, dropping more defenders into passing lanes and forcing Peyton Manning to throw short. They may do the same on Sunday, hoping to force a turnover with more defenders in the passing lanes while keeping New England's running game in check.

RBs BenJarvus Green-Ellis and Danny Woodhead are a potent one-two punch for the Patriots. Both can run, catch the ball out of the backfield and block, as they combined for 1,555 rushing yards and 464 receiving yards. Jets LBs Bart Scott and David Harris will look to contain the duo, as will SS Brodney Pool, who made some big plays in the Colts game by stopping runs on 3rd-and-short.

PATRIOTS DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE

WR 83 Welker / 11 Edelman / 18 Slater
 OLT 72 Light / 69 Ojinnaka / 64 LeVoi
 OLG 70 Mankins / 69 Ojinnaka
 C 67 Koppen / 62 Wendell
 ORG 63 Connolly / 62 Wendell
 ORT 76 Vollmer / 64 LeVoi
 TE 82 Crumpler / 87 Gronkowski* / 85 Hernandez*
 WR 84 Branch / 11 Edelman
 WR 19 Tate
 QB 12 Brady / 8 Hoyer
 RB 42 Green-Ellis / 39 Woodhead / 21 Taylor / 34 Morris

DEFENSE

DLE 92 G. Warren / 98 Moore / 91 Pryor
 NT 75 Wilfork / 91 Pryor
 DRE 74 Love* / 71 Deaderick* / 66 Cohen
 LOLB 50 Ninkovich / 95 Banta-Cain / 53 Murrell
 LILB 55 Spikes* / 59 Guyton
 RILB 51 Mayo / 52 Fletcher* / 58 White
 ROLB 96 Cunningham* / 95 Banta-Cain
 LCB 27 Arrington / 28 Butler
 RCB 32 McCourty* / 29 Carter
 SS 25 Chung / 44 Page
 FS 31 Meriweather / 36 Sanders / 38 Brown*

SPECIALISTS

P 14 Mesko*
 PK 5 Graham
 H 14 Mesko* / 8 Hoyer
 PR 11 Edelman / 19 Tate
 KR 19 Tate / 11 Edelman / 32 McCourty*
 LS 48 Katula

* Rookie

FANTASY FOOTBALL



First look: 2011 fantasy draft board

By Michael Blunda
Associate editor

When it comes to fantasy football, those who play the game can never get enough. Even during the offseason, they want their fill of stats, information and rankings. That's why we're here. In order to keep you busy between now and training camp, we have drawn up our first draft board for 2011, broken down by position. You can use this as a guide to making keeper-league decisions, as a way to begin planning your strategy for next season or anything in between. While things are constantly changing in the NFL, it's always good to stay ahead of the curve. These rankings should put you a step ahead of the competition.

QUARTERBACKS

1. Michael Vick / Eagles
2. Aaron Rodgers / Packers
3. Peyton Manning / Colts
4. Tom Brady / Patriots
5. Philip Rivers / Chargers
6. Drew Brees / Saints
7. Tony Romo / Cowboys
8. Matt Schaub / Texans
9. Ben Roethlisberger / Steelers
10. Eli Manning / Giants
11. Josh Freeman / Buccaneers
12. Matt Ryan / Falcons
13. Joe Flacco / Ravens
14. Jay Cutler / Bears
15. Matthew Stafford / Lions
16. Matt Cassel / Chiefs
17. David Garrard / Jaguars
18. Carson Palmer / Bengals
19. Sam Bradford / Rams
20. Ryan Fitzpatrick / Bills
21. Mark Sanchez / Jets
22. Tim Tebow / Broncos
23. Kyle Orton / Broncos
24. Donovan McNabb / Redskins
25. Jason Campbell / Raiders
26. Vince Young / Titans
27. Kerry Collins / Titans
28. Rex Grossman / Redskins
29. Colt McCoy / Browns
30. Chad Henne / Dolphins
31. Matt Hasselbeck / Seahawks
32. Kevin Kolb / Eagles
33. Charlie Whitehurst / Seahawks
34. Tarvaris Jackson / Vikings
35. Shaun Hill / Lions
36. John Skelton / Cardinals
37. Jimmy Clausen / Panthers
38. Alex Smith / 49ers
39. Tyler Thigpen / Dolphins
40. Joe Webb / Vikings

RUNNING BACKS

1. Arian Foster / Texans
2. Adrian Peterson / Vikings
3. Chris Johnson / Titans
4. Maurice Jones-Drew / Jaguars
5. Michael Turner / Falcons
6. Rashard Mendenhall / Steelers



Arian Foster

7. Frank Gore / 49ers
8. Darren McFadden / Raiders
9. Peyton Hillis / Browns
10. Jamaal Charles / Chiefs
11. Ray Rice / Ravens
12. LeSean McCoy / Eagles
13. Steven Jackson / Rams
14. Ahmad Bradshaw / Giants
15. Knowshon Moreno / Broncos
16. Matt Forté / Bears
17. LeGarrette Blount / Buccaneers
18. Ryan Grant / Packers
19. Ryan Mathews / Chargers
20. Jonathan Stewart / Panthers
21. DeAngelo Williams / Panthers
22. BenJarvus Green-Ellis / Patriots
23. Cedric Benson / Bengals
24. Felix Jones / Cowboys
25. Fred Jackson / Bills
26. Joseph Addai / Colts
27. Pierre Thomas / Saints
28. Jahvid Best / Lions
29. Shonn Greene / Jets
30. Ryan Torain / Redskins
31. LaDainian Tomlinson / Jets
32. Beanie Wells / Cardinals
33. Marshawn Lynch / Seahawks
34. Michael Bush / Raiders
35. Mike Tolbert / Chargers
36. Brandon Jacobs / Giants



Michael Vick



Roddy White

37. Thomas Jones / Chiefs
38. Tashard Choice / Cowboys
39. Ronnie Brown / Dolphins
40. Danny Woodhead / Patriots
41. Reggie Bush / Saints
42. Brandon Jackson / Packers
43. Tim Hightower / Cardinals
44. C.J. Spiller / Bills
45. Chris Ivory / Saints
46. Clinton Portis / Redskins
47. Donald Brown / Colts
48. Justin Forsett / Seahawks
49. Jason Snelling / Falcons
50. Willis McGahee / Ravens
51. Montario Hardesty / Browns
52. Maurice Morris / Lions
53. Marion Barber / Cowboys
54. Rashad Jennings / Jaguars
55. Cadillac Williams / Buccaneers
56. Ricky Williams / Dolphins
57. Ben Tate / Texans
58. Brian Westbrook / 49ers
59. Javon Ringer / Titans
60. Bernard Scott / Bengals

WIDE RECEIVERS

1. Roddy White / Falcons
2. Andre Johnson / Texans
3. Calvin Johnson / Lions
4. Hakeem Nicks / Giants



Antonio Gates

5. Greg Jennings / Packers
6. Dwayne Bowe / Chiefs
7. Reggie Wayne / Colts
8. Mike Wallace / Steelers
9. Miles Austin / Cowboys
10. Mike Williams / Buccaneers
11. DeSean Jackson / Eagles
12. Larry Fitzgerald / Cardinals
13. Kenny Britt / Titans
14. Vincent Jackson / Chargers
15. Jeremy Maclin / Eagles
16. Brandon Marshall / Dolphins
17. Brandon Lloyd / Broncos
18. Marques Colston / Saints
19. Sidney Rice / Vikings
20. Dez Bryant / Cowboys
21. Stevie Johnson / Bills
22. Antonio Holmes / Jets
23. Austin Collie / Colts
24. Wes Welker / Patriots
25. Percy Harvin / Vikings
26. Michael Crabtree / 49ers
27. Anquan Boldin / Ravens
28. Malcom Floyd / Chargers
29. Terrell Owens / Bengals
30. Santana Moss / Redskins
31. Chad Ochocinco / Bengals
32. Braylon Edwards / Jets
33. Mike Williams / Seahawks
34. Pierre Garcon / Colts

35. Johnny Knox / Bears
36. Steve Smith / Panthers
37. Mike Sims-Walker / Jaguars
38. Jerome Simpson / Bengals
39. Lance Moore / Saints
40. Steve Smith / Giants
41. Mark Clayton / Rams
42. Hines Ward / Steelers
43. Derrick Mason / Ravens
44. Deion Branch / Patriots
45. Mario Manningham / Giants
46. Mike Thomas / Jaguars
47. Nate Burleson / Lions
48. Lee Evans / Bills
49. Davone Bess / Dolphins
50. Robert Meachem / Saints
51. Demaryius Thomas / Broncos
52. James Jones / Packers
53. Louis Murphy / Raiders
54. Kevin Walter / Texans
55. Donald Driver / Packers
56. Jabar Gaffney / Broncos
57. Nate Washington / Titans
58. Steve Breaston / Cardinals
59. Jacoby Jones / Texans
60. Randy Moss / Titans
61. Danario Alexander / Rams
62. Mohamed Massaquoi / Browns
63. Emmanuel Sanders / Steelers
64. Jacoby Ford / Raiders
65. Arrelious Benn / Buccaneers
66. Danny Amendola / Rams
67. Jordan Shipley / Bengals
68. Josh Morgan / 49ers
69. Donnie Avery / Rams
70. Anthony Armstrong / Redskins
71. Brian Hartline / Dolphins
72. Legedu Naanee / Chargers
73. Earl Bennett / Bears
74. Jordy Nelson / Packers
75. Eddie Royal / Broncos

TIGHT ENDS

1. Antonio Gates / Chargers
2. Jason Witten / Cowboys
3. Vernon Davis / 49ers
4. Dallas Clark / Colts
5. Jermichael Finley / Packers
6. Mercedes Lewis / Jaguars
7. Chris Cooley / Redskins
8. Kellen Winslow / Buccaneers
9. Tony Gonzalez / Falcons
10. Rob Gronkowski / Patriots
11. Dustin Keller / Jets
12. Aaron Hernandez / Patriots
13. Owen Daniels / Texans
14. Zach Miller / Raiders
15. Brandon Pettigrew / Lions
16. Jimmy Graham / Saints
17. Ben Watson / Browns
18. Todd Heap / Ravens
19. Brent Celek / Eagles
20. Jermaine Gresham / Bengals
21. Visanthe Shiancoe / Vikings
22. Jared Cook / Titans
23. Kevin Boss / Giants
24. Heath Miller / Steelers
25. Tony Moeaki / Chiefs
26. Greg Olsen / Bears
27. Anthony Fasano / Dolphins
28. Jacob Tamme / Colts
29. Jeremy Shockey / Saints
30. Michael Hoomanawanui / Rams

NFL TEAM STATISTICS



BAL	BUF	CIN	CLE	DEN	HOU	IND	JAX	KC	MIA	NE	NYJ	OAK	PIT	SD	TEN	OFFENSE	AZ	ATL	CAR	CHI	DAL	DET	GB	MIN	NO	NYG	PHI	SF	SEA	STL	TB	WAS	NFL AVG	
12-4-0	4-12-0	4-12-0	5-11-0	4-12-0	6-10-0	10-6-0	8-8-0	10-6-0	7-9-0	14-2-0	11-5-0	8-8-0	12-4-0	9-7-0	6-10-0	GAMES (W-L-T)	5-11-0	13-3-0	2-14-0	11-5-0	6-10-0	6-10-0	10-6-0	6-10-0	11-5-0	10-6-0	10-6-0	7-9-0	7-9-0	10-6-0	6-10-0	NFL AVG		
303	263	317	265	309	360	366	330	319	300	335	307	306	295	357	252	FIRST DOWNS	241	353	225	263	327	304	312	289	351	331	322	251	260	292	288	295	302.8	
97	82	85	87	81	118	87	148	129	91	119	118	113	106	94	73	Rushing	67	111	78	76	104	83	88	104	94	112	116	85	81	84	97	72	96.3	
175	166	206	154	204	222	253	161	167	189	196	171	159	175	236	155	Passing	154	200	125	163	201	199	204	159	236	192	189	149	159	179	172	194	183.3	
31	15	26	24	24	20	26	21	23	20	20	18	34	14	27	24	Penalty	20	42	22	24	22	22	20	26	21	27	17	20	29	19	29	23.3		
5166	4878	5289	4635	5582	6186	6092	5460	5595	5170	5820	5616	5674	5525	6329	4834	TOTAL YARDS GAINED	4309	5458	4135	4631	5828	5423	5730	5039	5960	6085	6230	5013	4765	4846	5362	5374	5376.2	
322.9	304.9	330.6	289.7	348.9	386.6	380.8	341.3	349.7	323.1	363.8	351.0	354.6	345.3	395.6	302.1	Average Per Game	269.3	341.1	258.4	289.4	364.3	338.9	358.1	314.9	372.5	380.3	389.4	313.3	297.8	302.9	335.1	335.9	336.0	
1831	1720	1522	1646	1544	2042	1483	2395	2627	1643	1973	2374	2494	1924	1810	1727	RUSHING (NET)	1388	1891	1846	1616	1786	1613	1606	1942	1519	2200	2327	1657	1424	1578	2001	1461	1831.6	
114.4	107.5	95.1	102.9	96.5	127.6	92.7	149.7	164.2	102.7	123.3	148.4	155.9	120.3	113.1	107.9	Average Per Game	86.8	118.2	115.4	101.0	111.6	100.8	100.4	121.4	94.9	137.5	145.4	103.6	89.0	98.6	125.1	91.3	114.5	
3335	3158	3767	2989	4038	4144	4609	3065	2968	3527	3847	3242	3180	3601	4519	3107	PASSING (NET)	2921	3567	2289	3015	4042	3810	4124	3097	4441	3885	3903	3356	3341	3268	3361	3913	3544.7	
208.4	197.4	235.4	186.8	252.4	259.0	288.1	191.6	185.5	220.4	240.4	202.6	198.8	225.1	282.4	194.2	Average Per Game	182.6	222.9	143.1	188.4	252.6	238.1	257.8	193.6	277.6	242.8	243.9	209.8	208.8	204.3	210.1	244.6	221.5	
487	401	428	413	398	423	393	512	556	445	454	534	504	471	457	406	RUSHES	320	497	428	414	428	404	421	441	380	480	427	401	385	429	431	351	435.0	
3.8	4.3	3.6	4.0	3.9	4.8	3.8	4.7	4.7	3.7	4.3	4.4	4.9	4.1	4.0	4.3	Average Yards	4.3	3.8	4.3	3.9	4.2	4.0	4.2	4.4	4.0	4.6	4.4	4.1	3.7	3.7	4.6	4.2	4.2	
491	519	590	478	580	574	679	469	475	557	507	525	491	479	544	474	PASSES ATTEMPTED	561	577	484	466	576	633	541	505	661	539	561	500	544	590	494	605	539.7	
308	296	365	296	334	365	450	291	274	335	331	288	279	298	359	273	Completed	285	361	256	276	379	383	352	305	450	339	348	282	324	354	306	349	327.8	
62.7	57.0	61.9	61.9	57.6	63.6	66.3	62.0	57.7	60.1	65.3	54.9	56.8	62.2	66.0	57.6	Percent Completed	50.8	62.6	52.9	59.2	65.8	60.5	61.1	60.4	68.1	62.9	62.0	56.4	59.6	60.0	61.9	57.7	60.8	
40	34	28	36	40	32	16	38	32	38	25	28	44	43	38	27	Sacked	50	23	50	56	31	27	38	36	26	16	50	44	35	34	30	46	35.3	
294	213	221	214	269	226	91	291	221	228	175	178	291	289	227	171	Yards Lost	343	158	346	382	166	191	231	230	195	117	312	257	195	244	203	348	234.9	
10	21	20	18	12	12	17	21	8	21	5	14	16	9	13	15	Had Intercepted	19	9	21	21	19	16	13	26	22	25	13	15	20	15	6	19	16.0	
191	330	424	267	255	107	277	263	57	201	12	134	204	122	167	120	Yards Opp. Ret.	389	123	270	247	277	239	148	427	344	307	169	182	261	287	153	216	224.1	
0	2	5	3	1	2	4	1	2	0	1	2	0	1	0	1	Opp. TDs On Int.	4	0	5	2	3	2	1	3	4	1	1	1	2	1	2	1	2	1.8
81	75	72	78	86	63	69	57	90	75	58	84	78	74	56	77	PUNTS	94	75	95	83	66	90	71	83	57	73	73	91	78	94	76	94	77.1	
43.6	42.4	41.6	43.9	44.6	42.1	42.2	43.8	43.8	44.9	43.2	42.6	46.8	44.3	43.4	42.9	Gross Average	43.4	40.2	43.1	40.1	47.2	44.6	43.9	43.0	45.9	44.1	43.8	46.2	41.7	45.5	40.2	40.2	43.4	
4	7	6	5	7	5	8	7	11	4	5	4	4	11	9	4	Touchbacks	9	5	7	5	8	8	5	5	6	9	2	12	1	4	6	2	6.1	
39.2	36.6	38.2	39.0	36.6	36.8	35.5	39.2	37.3	37.8	38.4	38.1	40.7	37.3	30.8	39.1	Net Average	36.6	35.6	36.5	35.2	41.7	35.8	37.6	38.9	38.4	34.3	39.0	38.2	37.3	40.0	35.5	33.7	37.3	
0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	Blocked	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0.4
43	32	36	22	31	35	31	36	52	28	27	56	55	37	40	27	PUNT RETURNS	42	19	39	33	24	30	41	42	27	43	38	31	42	40	30	40	35.9	
7.4	10.5	7.2	10.7	10.4	6.7	6.9	10.0	10.1	10.5	13.4	9.4	7.0	6.1	10.5	12.2	Average Return	7.0	12.1	9.6	17.1	15.9	12.1	7.9	8.6	7.8	6.1	10.6	11.8	11.1	11.3	6.4	10.8	9.6	
0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	Return For TD	0	1	0	3	3	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0.4	
55	69	71	70	59	67	67	80	58	56	56	63	68	49	56	64	KICKOFF RETURNS	84	46	74	59	74	60	62	64	52	57	62	61	65	74	57	73	63.5	
24.7	21.1	21.8	17.0	24.3	19.8	19.6	23.8	19.7	21.4	22.0	25.2	22.5	23.5	24.0	24.3	Average Return	24.8	26.5	21.9	25.4	21.2	25.3	20.1	22.3	22.7	19.0	20.5	19.5	24.0	21.8	24.3	23.0	22.3	
1	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	2	2	3	1	0	1	Returns For TD	2	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	3	0	1	1	0.7	
90	82	90	78	98	90	79	83	90	72	83	103	148	100	84	128	PENALTIES	108	58	106	91	109	136	78	99	90	92	129	112	101	102	100	90	96.8	
673	633	725	675	944	690	709	675	771	595	766	934	1276	903	677	1040	Yards	870	598	918	768	863	1018	617	769	884	777	1101	933	890	877	837	647	814.2	
21	33	21	29	29	15	14	23	15	24	9	23	32	22	25	22	FUMBLES	33	12	31	19	28	19	20	20	23	26	33	22	18	14	24	29	22.8	
10	18	14	11	15	6	8	12	6	10	5	7	10	9	16	14	Fumbles Lost	16	8	16	10	11	9	9	17	12	8	11	6	13	12	10.9			
24	20	20	15	22	16	24	12	23	21	20	25	21	28	13	25	Opponent Fumbles	22	23	22	37	20	31	22	17	34	42	18	18	22	30	17	24	22.8	
8	11	10	9	8	5	11	5	9	8	13	18	12	14	7	8	Opponent Fumbles Rec.	13	9	12	14	10	15	8	11	16	23	11	7	10	12	9	13	10.9	
210	211	224	202	207	192	204	203	226	230	197	235	220	218	205	204	3RD-DOWN ATTEMPTS	209	240	227	195	211	242	205	205	217	206	214	213	214	235	211	208	213.8	
82	80	87	75	67	79	91	81	82	95	95	94	92	71	92	71	Conv. to 1st Down	58	112	69	64	86	97	85	71	106	74	85	68	76	78	89	61	81.8	
39.0	37.9	38.8	37.1	32.4	41.1	44.6	39.9	36.7	40.0	48.2	39.6	34.1	43.1	44.9	34.8	3rd Down Efficiency	27.8	46.7	30.4	32.8	40.8	40.1	41.5	34.6	48.8	35.9	39.7	31.9	35.5	33.2	42.2	29.3	38.2	
10	24	19	7	19	19	8	25	23	10	14	14	20	5	13	14	4TH-DOWN ATTEMPTS	18	15	23	7	22	16	13	17	11	11	13	16	17	15	14	12	15.1	
4	11	13	5	6	9	5	15	10	3	7	5	8	2	5	8	Conv. to 1st Down	7	11	10	2	13	10	5	8	5	3	9	8	6	8	10	6	7.4	
40.0	45.8	68.4	71.4	31.6	47.4	62.5	60.0	43.5	30.0	50.0	35.7	40.0	40.0	38.5	57.1	4th-Down Efficiency	38.9	73.3	43.5	28.6	59.1	62.5												

NFL TEAM RANKINGS

AFC

BAL	BUF	CIN	CLE	DEN	HOU	IND	JAX	KC	MIA	NE	NYJ	OAK	PIT	SD	TEN	OFFENSE	AZ	ATL	CAR	CHI	DAL	DET	GB	MIN	NO	NYG	PHI	SF	SEA	STL	TB	WAS
22	25	20	29	13	3	4	15	12	21	8	11	10	14	1	27	Total Yards/Game	31	16	32	30	7	17	9	23	6	5	2	24	28	26	19	18
14	18	27	20	26	7	29	3	1	21	9	4	2	11	15	17	Rushing Yards/Game	32	12	13	22	16	23	24	10	28	6	5	19	31	25	8	30
28	13	32	21	24	3	27	5	4	30	10	8	2	18	22	14	Avg. Gain/Rush	11	26	12	23	15	20	25	9	19	7	1	17	29	31	6	16
20	24	13	29	7	4	1	27	30	16	11	22	23	14	2	25	Passing Yards/Game	31	15	32	28	6	12	5	26	3	10	9	18	19	21	17	8
13	29	16	24	9	6	8	17	23	21	2	22	20	5	1	14	Avg. Gain/Pass Play	31	19	32	25	7	26	3	28	10	4	12	15	27	30	11	18
6	27	23	25	7	8	12	29	4	26	1	15	19	5	10	18	Pct. Had Intercepted	22	3	28	30	20	13	11	32	21	31	9	16	24	14	2	17
25	15	6	22	18	10	1	24	16	17	7	8	29	30	19	11	Pct. QB Sacks Allowed	27t	4	31	32	9	5	20	21	3	2	27t	26	14	12	13	23
18	26t	12	25	14	2	1	8	11	19	6	15	16	20t	3	29	First Downs/Game	31	4	32	26t	9	17	13	23	5	7	10	30	28	22	24	20t
23	21	24	25	12	2	9	15	18	27	4	19	13	11	1	16	Avg. Gain/Off. Play	30	26	32	28	7	22	6	20	10	5	3	17	29	31	8	14
16	18	17	19	28	9	5	13	20	12	2	15	25	6	4	23	3rd Down Efficiency	32	3	30	27	10	11	8	24	1	21	14	29	22	26	7	31
21t	17	5	2t	29	15	6t	8	19t	30	12t	27	21t	21t	25t	10	4th Down Efficiency	24	1	19t	31	9	6t	25t	16	18	32	4	12t	28	11	2t	12t
24	13t	25	11	16	29	28	18	17	15	3	20	26	32	13t	4	Punt Return Avg.	27	5	19	1	2	6	22	21	23	31	12	7	9	8	30	10
6	24	20	32	7	27	29	12	28	22	18	4	16	13	11	9	Kickoff Return Avg.	5	1	19	2	23	3	26	17	15	31	25	30	10	21	8	14
16	24	28	11	8	26	25	13	14	6	19	23	2	9	18	22	Gross Punting Avg.	17	29	20	32	1	7	12	21	4	10	15	3	27	5	30	31
4	23	15	8	22	20	27	5	18	19	11	13	2	16	32	6	Net Punting Avg.	21	29	24	28	1	25	14	9	10	30	7	12	17	3	26	31
16	28	22	31	19	9	4	18	14	30	1	13	6	12	2	17	Points/Game	26t	5	32	21	7t	15	10	29	11	7t	3	24	23	26t	20	25
1t	27t	32	1t	25	1t	1t	1t	1t	1t	27t	1t	1t	1t	1t	1t	Extra Point Pct.	1t	1t	1t	1t	31	26	1t	29	1t	1t	1t	1t	1t	30	1t	1t
6	29	26	17t	8t	5	2	23t	27t	31	8t	27t	1t	25	19	3	Field Goal Pct.	7	4	10	13t	30	13t	23t	1	21	16	12	20	13t	11	17t	32

NFC

BAL	BUF	CIN	CLE	DEN	HOU	IND	JAX	KC	MIA	NE	NYJ	OAK	PIT	SD	TEN	DEFENSE	AZ	ATL	CAR	CHI	DAL	DET	GB	MIN	NO	NYG	PHI	SF	SEA	STL	TB	WAS
10	24	15	22	32	30	20	28	14	6	25	3	11	2	1	26	Opp. Yards/Game	29	16	18	9	23	21	5	8	4	7	12	13	27	19	17	31
5	32	19	27	31	13	25	22	14	7	11	3	29	1	4	20	Opp. Rush Yds./Game	30	10	23	2	12	24	18	9	16	8	15	6	21	17	28	26
8	32	21	12	29	11	25	30	18	4	16	3	23	1	5	7	Avg. Gain/Rush	20	27	10	6	19	24	28	9	17	13	14	2	15	22	31	26
21	3	14t	18	25	32	13	28	17	8	30	6	2	12	1	29	Opp. Pass Yds./Game	23	22	11	20	26	16	5	10	4	9	14t	24	27	19	7	31
7	19	24	27	30	31	16	32	5	20	23	4	10	2	1	15	Avg. Gain/Pass Play	26	18	17	8	28	21	3	13	12	6	14	22	25	9	11	29
13	26	14	5	30	25	31	20	24	28	3	27	21	9	10	18	Pct. Intercepted By	12	4	11	8	6	19	1	16	32	15	2	17	29	22	7	23
32	23	27	22	31	26	24	28	11	7	19	9	1	6	2	15	QB Sack Pct.	17	25	18	21	13	5	3	20	12	4	10	14	16	8	30	29
10t	28	12	23	27	31	21	22	14	3	30	5t	13	5t	1	32	Opp. 1st Downs/Game	29	10t	26	9	18t	24	4	8	7	2	18t	15	20	16	17	25
6	20	25	19	29	31	21	32	12	4	26	3	15	1	2	13	Avg. Gain/Def. Play	23	27	7	5	28	22	9	11	14	10	16	8	24	17	18	30
15	30	14	28	17t	23	21	27	13	11	32	10	7	3	4	29	3rd Down Efficiency	12	22	16	6	25	20	9	26	5	1	17t	19	24	2	31	8
17t	29t	3	31	25t	32	12t	12t	5	6	24	28	2	25t	11	7	4th Down Efficiency	20t	20t	12t	16	12t	8t	4	17t	27	20t	8t	1	10	17t	20t	29t
11	20	1	5	24t	10	23	4	12	22	6	26	14	18	32	2	Opp. Punt Return Avg.	30	13	16	9	3	27	24t	8	28	31	17	15	19	21	7	29
32	11	19	1	28	25	31	10	6	30	17	3	18	5	16	29	Opp. Kickoff Ret. Avg.	26	9	20	22	27	7	13	23	24	4	12	15	14	21	8	2
17	6	4	23	14	19	25	9	29	8	5	30	20	1	7	11	Opp. Gross Punt Avg.	32	31	18	3	13	21	28	24	26	16	22	10	15	27	2	12
27	6	14	22	18	23	29	8	13	19	2	24	20	10	12	3	Opp. Net Punt Avg.	32	31	11	1	4	21	28	26	30	25	17	16	5	15	7	9
3	28	24	13	32	29	23	27	11	14	8	6	20	1	10	15	Opp. Points/Game	30	5	26	4	31	19	2	18	7	17	21t	16	25	12	9	21t
19	4	20t	5t	12	7t	24	28	17t	26	2	9t	5t	25	32	14	Opp. Field Goal Pct.	11	1	27	7t	30	31	16	9t	15	22	23	20t	17t	29	13	3

BAL	BUF	CIN	CLE	DEN	HOU	IND	JAX	KC	MIA	NE	NYJ	OAK	PIT	SD	TEN	MISCELLANEOUS	AZ	ATL	CAR	CHI	DAL	DET	GB	MIN	NO	NYG	PHI	SF	SEA	STL	TB	WAS
6	30	26	23	29	18	11t	24	13	22	1	8	14	3	5	16	Point Differential	31	4	32	10	21	17	2	25	7	11t	9	20	28	19	15	27
9	32	25t	15t	27t	13t	19t	31	5t	30	1	5t	17	2	23t	19t	Turnover Edge	22	3	25t	11t	13t	11t	4	29	23t	18	5t	15t	27t	10	5t	19t
2	18	14	13	20	4	10	12	5	7	21	31	23	29	11	19	Penalty Yards Edge	15	1	24	16	30	26	6	17	27	9	32	22	28	8	25	3
20	14	9	5	19	22	28	6	13	18	3	23	24	27	31	4	Punt Ret. Differential	30	7	16	2	1	17	26	15	29	32	12	8	10	11	21	25
21	16	24	19	12	31	32	7	15	30	14	1	17	6	9	13	KO Return Differential	11	2	26	10	29	3	25	23	22	18	20	28	8	27	5	4
15	28	11	26	25	22	19	7	14	16	23	4	9	5	1	32	Time of Possession	31	3	30	21	12	20	8	18	6	2	10	24	29	13	17	27

TURNOVERS

	GAME			SEASON			DIF
	Fum	Int	Tot	Fum	Int	Tot	
N.E.	1	0	1	5	5	10	+28
Pitt.	0	0	0	9	9	18	+17
Atl.	1	0	1	8	9	17	+1
G.B.	1	1	2	9	13	22	+10
K.C.	0	2	2	6	8	14	+9
N.Y.J.	0	1	1	7	14	21	+9
Phil.	1	3	4	12	13	25	+9
T.B.	2	0	2	13	6	19	+9
Balt.	1	1	2	10	10	20	+7
St.L.	0	1	1	6	15	21	+5
Chi.	0	2	2	10	21	31	+4
Det.	1	1	2	9	16	25	+4
Dall.	1	0	1	11	19	30	+0
Hou.	0	0	0	6	12	18	+0
Clev.	0	3	3	11	18	29	+0
S.F.	0	0	0	8	15	23	-1
Oak.	1	0	1	10	16	26	-2
N.Y.G.	0	1	1	17	25	42	-3
Ind.	1	0	1	8	17	25	-4
Ten.	1	0	1	14	15	29	-4
Wash.	3	1	4	12	19	31	-4
Ariz.	0	2	2	16	19	35	-5
N.O.	2	1	3	9	22	31	-6
S.D.	0	1	1	16	13	29	-6
Car.	1	1	2	16	21	37	-8
Cin.	3	2	5	14	20	34	-8
Den.	0	2	2	15	12	27	-9
Sea.	1	0	1	11	20	31	-9
Minn.	0	1	1	11			

AFC INDIVIDUAL STATISTICS

RUSHING

Player	Team	Att	Yds	Avg	Lg	TD
Foster	Hou.	327	1,616	4.9	74	16
Charles	K.C.	230	1,467	6.4	80	5
C. Johnson	Ten.	316	1,364	4.3	76	11
Jones-Drew	Jax.	299	1,324	4.4	37	5
Mendenhall	Pitt.	324	1,273	3.9	50	13
Rice	Balt.	307	1,220	4.0	50	5
Hillis	Clev.	270	1,177	4.4	48	11
D. McFadden	Oak.	223	1,157	5.2	57	7
Benson	Cin.	321	1,111	3.5	26	7
Green-Ellis	N.Y.J.	229	1,008	4.4	33	13
F. Jackson	Buff.	222	927	4.2	39	5
Tomlinson	N.Y.J.	219	914	4.2	31	6
Jones	K.C.	245	896	3.7	70	6
Moreno	Den.	182	779	4.3	35	5
Greene	N.Y.J.	185	766	4.1	23	2
Tolbert	S.D.	182	735	4.0	36	11
R. Brown	Mia.	200	734	3.7	51	5
Mathews	S.D.	158	678	4.3	31	7
Williams	Mia.	159	673	4.2	45	2
Bush	Oak.	158	655	4.1	30	8
Woodhead	N.E.	97	547	5.6	36	5
D. Brown	Ind.	129	497	3.9	49	2
Addai	Ind.	116	495	4.3	46	4
Jennings	Jax.	84	459	5.5	74	4
McGahee	Balt.	100	380	3.8	30	5
Ward	Hou.	50	315	6.3	38	4
B. Smith	N.Y.J.	38	299	7.9	53	1
Scott	Cin.	61	299	4.9	18	1
Spiller	Buff.	74	283	3.8	20	0
Garrard	Jax.	66	279	4.2	25	5
Fitzpatrick	Buff.	40	269	6.7	22	0
Sproles	S.D.	50	267	5.3	41	0
Redman	Pitt.	52	247	4.8	23	0
Ringer	Ten.	51	239	4.7	54	2
Tebow	Den.	43	227	5.3	40	6
J. Campbell	Oak.	47	222	4.7	24	1
McKnight	N.Y.J.	39	189	4.8	18	0
Hart	Ind.	43	185	4.3	35	1
Roethlisberger	Pitt.	34	176	5.2	31	2
Rhodes	Ind.	37	172	4.6	15	0

RECEIVING

Player	Team	No	Yds	Avg	Lg	TD
Wayne	Ind.	111	1,355	12.2	50	6
A. Johnson	Hou.	86	1,216	14.1	60	8
Marshall	Mia.	86	1,014	11.8	46	3
Welker	N.E.	86	848	9.9	35	7
St. Johnson	Buff.	82	1,073	13.1	45	10
Bess	Mia.	79	820	10.4	29	5
Lloyd	Den.	77	1,448	18.8	71	11
Bowe	K.C.	72	1,162	16.1	75	15
Owens	Cin.	72	983	13.7	78	9
Watson	Clev.	68	763	11.2	44	3
Ochoicenco	Cin.	67	831	12.4	42	4
Garcon	Ind.	67	784	11.7	57	6
Tammie	Ind.	67	631	9.4	30	4
M. Thomas	Jax.	66	820	12.4	50	4
Foster	Hou.	66	604	9.2	50	2
Gaffney	Den.	65	875	13.5	50	2
Boldin	Balt.	64	837	13.1	61	7
Rice	Balt.	63	556	8.8	34	1
Branch	N.E.	61	818	13.4	79	6
Mason	Balt.	61	802	13.1	42	7
Hillis	Clev.	61	477	7.8	47	2
Wallace	Pitt.	60	1,257	21.0	56	10
Z. Miller	Oak.	60	685	11.4	43	5
Ward	Pitt.	59	755	12.8	43	5
Royal	Den.	59	627	10.6	41	3
Sproles	S.D.	59	520	8.8	57	2
Lewis	Jax.	58	700	12.1	42	10
Collie	Ind.	58	649	11.2	73	8
Keller	N.Y.J.	55	687	12.5	41	5
Edwards	N.Y.J.	53	904	17.1	74	7
Holmes	N.Y.J.	52	746	14.3	52	6
Shiple	Cin.	52	600	11.5	64	3
Gresham	Cin.	52	471	9.1	27	4
Tomlinson	N.Y.J.	52	368	7.1	21	2
Walter	Hou.	51	621	12.2	35	5
Jones	Hou.	51	562	11.0	47	3
Gates	S.D.	50	782	15.6	48	10
Moeaki	K.C.	47	556	11.8	34	3
D. McFadden	Oak.	47	507	10.8	67	3
Hernandez	N.E.	45	563	12.5	46	6
Charles	K.C.	45	468	10.4	31	3
C. Johnson	Ten.	44	245	5.6	25	1
B. Hartline	Mia.	43	615	14.3	54	1
Sims-Walker	Jax.	43	562	13.1	39	7
Britt	Ten.	42	775	18.5	80	9
Washington	Ten.	42	687	16.4	71	6
Gronkowski	N.E.	42	546	13.0	28	10
Miller	Pitt.	42	512	12.2	36	2
Murphy	Oak.	41	609	14.9	70	2
Cotchery	N.Y.J.	41	433	10.6	49	2
Heap	Balt.	40	599	15.0	65	5
Stuckey	Clev.	40	346	8.7	25	0
Fasano	Mia.	39	528	13.5	31	4
Daniels	Hou.	38	471	12.4	31	2
Floyd	S.D.	37	717	19.4	55	6
Evans	Buff.	37	578	15.6	54	4
Moreno	Den.	37	372	10.1	45	3
Clark	Ind.	37	347	9.4	50	3
Dreesen	Hou.	36	518	14.4	43	4
Massaquoi	Clev.	36	483	13.4	41	2
White	Ind.	36	355	9.9	33	5
Scaife	Ten.	36	318	8.8	30	4
Woodhead	N.E.	34	379	11.1	50	1
Jones-Drew	Jax.	34	317	9.3	75	2
Parrish	Buff.	33	400	12.1	37	2
R. Brown	Mia.	33	242	7.3	24	0
D. Nelson	Buff.	31	353	11.4	37	3
F. Jackson	Buff.	31	215	6.9	65	2
Houshmandzadeh	Balt.	30	398	13.3	56	3
Cook	Ten.	29	361	12.4	36	1
Robiskie	Clev.	29	514	10.7	46	3
Crayton	S.D.	28	514	18.4	49	1
Moss	Ten.	28	393	14.0	37	5

PASSING

Player	Team	Att	Comp	Pct	Yds	TD	TD Pct	Lg	Int	Int Pct	Avg	Rating
T. Brady	N.E.	492	324	65.9	3,900	36	7.3	79	4	0.8	7.93	111.0
Rivers	S.D.	541	357	66.0	4,710	30	5.5	59	13	2.4	8.71	101.8
Roethlisberger	Pitt.	389	240	61.7	3,200	17	4.4	56	5	1.3	8.23	97.0
Flacco	Balt.	489	306	62.6	3,622	25	5.1	67	10	2.0	7.41	93.6
Cassel	K.C.	450	262	58.2	3,116	27	6.0	75	7	1.6	6.92	93.0
Schaub	Hou.	574	365	63.6	4,370	24	4.2	60	12	2.1	7.61	92.0
Manning	Ind.	679	450	66.3	4,700	33	4.9	73	17	2.5	6.92	91.9
Garrard	Jax.	366	236	64.5	2,734	23	6.3	75	15	4.1	7.47	90.8
Orton	Den.	498	293	58.8	3,653	20	4.0	71	9	1.8	7.34	87.5
J. Campbell	Oak.	329	194	59.0	2,387	13	4.0	73	8	2.4	7.26	84.5
C. Palmer	Cin.	586	362	61.8	3,970	26	4.4	78	20	3.4	6.77	82.4
Collins	Ten.	278	160	57.6	1,823	14	5.0	80	8	2.9	6.56	82.2
Fitzpatrick	Buff.	441	255	57.8	3,000	23	5.2	65	15	3.4	6.80	81.8
Henne	Mia.	490	301	61.4	3,301	15	3.1	57	19	3.9	6.74	75.4
Sanchez	N.Y.J.	507	278	54.8	3,291	17	3.4	74	13	2.6	6.49	75.3

NON-QUALIFIERS

Young	Ten.	156	93	59.6	1,255	10	6.4	71	3	1.9	8.04	98.6
S. Wallace	Clev.	101	64	63.4	694	4	4.0	65	2	2.0	6.87	88.5
Tebow	Den.	82	41	50.0	654	5	6.1	50	3	3.7	7.98	82.1
McCoy	Clev.	222	135	60.8	1,576	6	2.7	47	9	4.1	7.10	74.5
Thigpen	Mia.	62	33	53.2	435	2	3.2	35	2	3.2	7.02	73.0
Gradkowski	Oak.	157	83	52.9	1,059	5	3.2	70	7	4.5	6.75	66.3
Delhomme	Clev.	149	93	62.4	872	2	1.3	49	7	4.7	5.85	63.4
T. Edwards	Jax.	101	55	54.5	521	2	2.0	44	5	5.0	5.16	54.9
Sanders	Pitt.	28	376	13.4	35	2						
Buckhalter	Den.	28	240	8.6	23	2						
Benson	Cin.	28	178	6.4	24	1						
Heyward-Bey	Oak.	26	366	14.1	69	1						
Jennings	Jax.	26	223	8.6	25	0						
Moore	Pitt.	26	205	7.9	29	0						
Ford	Oak.	25	470	18.8	52	2						
Caldwell	Cin.	25	345	13.8	53	0						
Reece	Oak.	25	333	13.3	73	3						
Tolbert	S.D.	25	216	8.6	28	0						
Tate	N.E.	24	432	18.0	65	3						
Spiller	Buff.	24	157	6.5	41	1						
Naanee	S.D.	23	371	16.1	59	1						
Cribbs	Clev.	23	292	12.7	65	1						
Mendenhall	Pitt.	23	167	7.3	24	0						
D. Thomas	Den.	22	283	12.9	31	2						
Randle El	Pitt.	22	253	11.5	34	0						
Chambers	K.C.	22	213	9.7	26	1						
Hester	S.D.	22	145	6.6	21	1						
Mathews	S.D.	22	145	6.6	17	0						
B. Davis	S.D.	21	259	12.3	49	1						
McCluster	K.C.	21	209	10.0	31	1						
L. McClain	Balt.	21	134	6.4	19	0						
Simpson	Cin.	20	277	13.9	59	3						
Gage	Ten.	20	266	13.3	30	1						
McMichael	S.D.	20	221	11.1	28	2						
Miller	Jax.	20	216	10.8	52	1						
D. Brown	Ind.	20	205	10.3	25	0						
Leonard	Cin.	20	137	6.9	20	1						
Williams	Mia.	19	141	7.4	28	1						
Addai	Ind.	19	124	6.5	15	0						
Jones	Buff.	18	213	11.8	40	1						
Bush	Oak.	18	194	10.8	55	0						
Copper	K.C.	18	157	8.7	20	0						
Graham	Den.	18	148	8.2	28	0						
Moore	Clev.	16	322	20.1	49	1						
D. Williams	Ten.	16	219	13.7	39	0						
A. Brown	Pitt.	16	167	10.4	26							

NFC INDIVIDUAL STATISTICS

RUSHING

Player	Team	Att	Yds	Avg	Lg	TD
Turner	Atl.	334	1,371	4.1	55	12
Peterson	Min.	283	1,298	4.6	80	12
Jackson	St.L.	330	1,241	3.8	42	6
Bradshaw	N.Y.G.	276	1,235	4.5	48	8
McCoy	Phil.	207	1,080	5.2	62	7
Forte	Chi.	237	1,069	4.5	68	6
Blount	T.B.	201	1,007	5.0	53	6
Gore	S.F.	203	853	4.2	64	3
Jacobs	N.Y.G.	147	823	5.6	73	9
Jones	Dall.	185	800	4.3	34	1
Stewart	Car.	178	770	4.3	48	2
Torain	Wash.	164	742	4.5	54	4
Lynch	Sea.	202	737	3.6	75	6
Hightower	Ariz.	153	736	4.8	80	5
Ivory	N.O.	137	716	5.2	55	5
Jackson	G.B.	190	703	3.7	71	3
Vick	Phil.	100	676	6.8	35	9
Best	Det.	171	555	3.2	45	4
Forsett	Sea.	118	523	4.4	32	2
Goodson	Car.	103	452	4.4	45	3
C. Williams	T.B.	125	437	3.5	45	2
B. Wells	Ariz.	116	397	3.4	24	2
Barber	Dall.	113	374	3.3	25	4
Freeman	T.B.	68	364	5.4	33	0
D. Williams	Car.	87	361	4.1	39	1
Rodgers	G.B.	64	356	5.6	27	4
Westbrook	S.F.	77	340	4.4	30	4
Morris	Det.	90	336	3.7	26	5
J. Harrison	Phil.	71	330	4.6	50	1
Snelling	Atl.	87	324	3.7	30	2
Gerhart	Min.	81	322	4.0	21	1
Kuhn	G.B.	84	281	3.3	18	4
P. Thomas	N.O.	83	269	3.2	16	2
Taylor	Chi.	112	267	2.4	24	3
K. Williams	Wash.	65	261	4.0	32	3
Choice	Dall.	66	243	3.7	26	3
Dixon	S.F.	70	237	3.4	34	2
Cutler	Chi.	50	232	4.6	25	1
Portis	Wash.	54	227	4.2	27	2

RECEIVING

Player	Team	No	Yds	Avg	Lg	TD
White	Atl.	115	1,389	12.1	46	10
Witten	Dall.	94	1,002	10.7	33	9
Moss	Wash.	93	1,115	12.0	56	6
Fitzgerald	Ariz.	90	1,137	12.6	41	6
Amendola	St.L.	85	689	8.1	36	3
Colston	N.O.	84	1,023	12.2	43	7
Nicks	N.Y.G.	79	1,052	13.3	46	11
McCoy	Phil.	78	592	7.6	40	2
C. Johnson	Det.	77	1,120	14.5	87	12
Cooley	Wash.	77	849	11.0	35	3
Jennings	G.B.	76	1,265	16.6	86	12
Harvin	Min.	71	868	12.2	53	5
Pettigrew	Det.	71	722	10.2	35	4
Maclin	Phil.	70	964	13.8	83	10
Gonzalez	Atl.	70	656	9.4	34	6
Austin	Dall.	69	1,041	15.1	69	7
L. Moore	N.O.	66	763	11.6	80	8
Winslow	T.B.	66	730	11.1	41	5
M. Williams	T.B.	65	964	14.8	58	11
M. Williams	Sea.	65	751	11.6	68	2
Manningham	N.Y.G.	60	944	15.7	92	9
Best	Det.	58	487	8.4	75	7
V. Davis	S.F.	56	914	16.3	66	7
Crabtree	S.F.	55	741	13.5	60	6
Burleson	Det.	55	625	11.4	58	6
B. Gibson	St.L.	53	620	11.7	41	2
Knox	Chi.	51	960	18.8	67	5
Avant	Phil.	51	573	11.2	34	1
Driver	G.B.	51	565	11.1	61	4
Forte	Chi.	51	547	10.7	89	3
J. Jones	G.B.	50	679	13.6	66	5
Smith	N.Y.G.	48	529	11.0	45	3
Jones	Dall.	48	450	9.4	71	1
D. Jackson	Phil.	47	1,056	22.5	91	6
Breaston	Ariz.	47	718	15.3	37	1
Shiancoe	Min.	47	530	11.3	33	2
Bradshaw	N.Y.G.	47	314	6.7	18	0
Bennett	Chi.	46	561	12.2	48	3
S. Smith	Car.	46	554	12.0	39	2
Gore	S.F.	46	452	9.8	41	2
Jackson	St.L.	46	383	8.3	49	0
C. Williams	T.B.	46	355	7.7	20	1
Nelson	G.B.	45	582	12.9	80	2
Bryant	Dall.	45	561	12.5	46	6
Scheffler	Det.	45	378	8.4	25	1
Armstrong	Wash.	44	871	19.8	76	3
Morgan	S.F.	44	698	15.9	65	2
Meachem	N.O.	44	638	14.5	55	5
Snelling	Atl.	44	303	6.9	28	3
Jackson	G.B.	43	342	8.0	37	1
Celek	Phil.	42	511	12.2	65	4
Jenkins	Atl.	41	505	12.3	43	2
Shockey	N.O.	41	408	10.0	31	3
Olsen	Chi.	41	404	9.9	39	5
Fells	St.L.	41	391	9.5	36	2
Hester	Chi.	40	475	11.9	39	4
Goodson	Car.	40	310	7.8	32	0
K. Williams	Wash.	39	309	7.9	36	2
LaFell	Car.	38	468	12.3	44	1
R. Williams	Dall.	37	530	14.3	63	5
Gettis	Car.	37	508	13.7	88	3
Butler	Sea.	36	385	10.7	63	4
Peterson	Min.	36	341	9.5	34	1
Boss	N.Y.G.	35	531	15.2	54	5
Henderson	N.O.	34	464	13.6	57	1
Robinson	St.L.	34	344	10.1	32	2
Bush	N.O.	34	208	6.1	20	1
Bennett	Dall.	33	260	7.9	32	0
Forsett	Sea.	33	252	7.6	21	0
Rosario	Car.	32	264	8.3	26	0
Graham	N.O.	31	356	11.5	52	5
Stokley	Sea.	31	354	11.4	36	0
Carlson	Sea.	31	318	10.3	37	1
Obomanu	Sea.	30	494	16.5	87	4

PASSING

Player	Team	Att	Comp	Pct	Yds	TD	TD Pct	Lg	Int	Int Pct	Avg Gain	Rating
Rodgers	G.B.	475	312	65.7	3,922	28	5.9	86	11	2.3	8.26	101.2
Vick	Phil.	372	233	62.6	3,018	21	5.6	91	6	1.6	8.11	100.2
Freeman	T.B.	474	291	61.4	3,451	25	5.3	64	6	1.3	7.28	95.9
Ryan	Atl.	571	357	62.5	3,705	28	4.9	46	9	1.6	6.49	91.0
Brees	N.O.	658	448	68.1	4,620	33	5.0	80	22	3.3	7.02	90.9
Kitna	Dall.	318	209	65.7	2,365	16	5.0	71	12	3.8	7.44	88.9
Cutler	Chi.	432	261	60.4	3,274	23	5.3	89	16	3.7	7.58	86.3
Manning	N.Y.G.	539	339	62.9	4,002	31	5.8	92	25	4.6	7.42	85.3
A. Smith	S.F.	342	204	59.6	2,370	14	4.1	62	10	2.9	6.93	82.1
Sh. Hill	Det.	416	257	61.8	2,686	16	3.8	75	12	2.9	6.46	81.3
McNabb	Wash.	472	275	58.3	3,377	14	3.0	76	15	3.2	7.15	77.1
Bradford	St.L.	590	354	60.0	3,512	18	3.1	49	15	2.5	5.95	76.5
Hasselbeck	Sea.	444	266	59.9	3,001	12	2.7	87	17	3.8	6.76	73.2
Favre	Min.	358	217	60.6	2,509	11	3.1	53	19	5.3	7.01	69.9
Anderson	Ariz.	327	169	51.7	2,065	7	2.1	43	10	3.1	6.31	65.9
Clausen	Car.	299	157	52.5	1,558	3	1.0	55	9	3.0	5.21	58.4

Player	Team	Att	Comp	Pct	Yds	TD	TD Pct	Lg	Int	Int Pct	Avg Gain	Rating
Romo	Dall.	213	148	69.5	1,605	11	5.2	69	7	3.3	7.54	94.9
Stafford	Det.	96	57	59.4	535	6	6.3	36	1	1.0	5.57	91.3
Flynn	G.B.	66	40	60.6	433	3	4.5	66	2	3.0	6.56	82.4
Grossman	Wash.	133	74	55.6	884	7	5.3	64	4	3.0	6.65	81.2
Stanton	Det.	119	69	58.0	780	4	3.4	87	3	2.5	6.55	78.4
T. Smith	S.F.	145	73	50.3	1,176	5	3.4	66	4	2.8	8.11	77.8
Kolb	Phil.	189	115	60.8	1,197	7	3.7	83	7	3.7	6.33	76.1
Whitehurst	Sea.	99	57	57.6	507	2	2.0	61	3	3.0	5.12	65.5
Skelton	Ariz.	126	60	47.6	662	2	1.6	74	2	1.6	5.25	62.3
Webb	Min.	89	54	60.7	477	0	0.0	46	3	3.4	5.36	60.9
M. Moore	Car.	143	79	55.2	857	5	3.5	39	10	7.0	5.99	55.6
M. Hall	Ariz.	78	39	50.0	370	1	1.3	26	6	7.7	4.74	35.7

Player	Team	Att	Comp	Pct	Yds	TD	TD Pct	Lg	Int	Int Pct	Avg Gain	Rating
D. Thomas	N.O.	30	219	7.3	22	2						
Walker	S.F.	29	331	11.4	38	0						
P. Thomas	N.O.	29	201	6.9	23	0						
Berrian	Min.	28	252	9.0	30	0						
Doucet	Ariz.	26	291	11.2	36	1						
Benn	T.B.	25	395	15.8	64	2						
Morris	Det.	25	170	6.8	16	0						
Roberts	Ariz.	24	307	12.8	74	2						
Stroughter	T.B.	24	239	10.0	27	0						
Hagan	N.Y.G.	24	223	9.3	17	1						
Clayton	St.L.	23	306	13.3	39	2						
Betts	N.O.	23	141	6.1	25	0						
Douglas	Atl.	22	294	13.4	46	1						
Lynch	Sea.	22	145	6.6	22	0						
F. Davis	Wash.	21	316	15.0	71	3						
Finley	G.B.	21	301	14.3	34	1						
Quarless	G.B.	21	238	11.3	23	1						
Tate	Sea.	21	227	10.8	52	0						
Gerhart	Min.	21	167	8.0	23	0						
Hightower	Ariz.	21	136	6.5	20	0						
Alexander	St.L.	20	306	15.3	46	1						
Camarillo	Min.	20	240	12.0	31	1						
Sellers	Wash.	20	224	11.2	28	0						
Taylor	Chi.	20	139	7.0	18	0						
Finneran	Atl.	19	166	8.7	21	3						
Schmitt	Phil.	19	136	7.2	18	1						
King	Car.	19	121	6.4	16	2						
B. Johnson	Det.	18	210	11.7	24	0						
Torain												

WILD-CARD GAME COVERAGE



Marshawn Lynch's impressive 67-yard touchdown run clinched Seattle's upset victory.

SEAHAWKS 41, SAINTS 36

SUMMARY This year's wild-card round couldn't have gotten off to a wilder start, as the Seahawks, who entered the game as the biggest home underdog in postseason history (10.5 points), rebounded from 10-0 and 17-7 deficits to stun the defending Super Bowl champion Saints 41-36 at Qwest Field. Veteran Seahawks QB Matt Hasselbeck, who was not officially named the starter until the Thursday before the game after sitting out the previous week with a hip injury, matched the Saints' Drew Brees shot for shot, rifling four TD passes, including a pair to TE John Carlson. The Seahawks surged ahead of the Saints on the strength of a 27-3 run in the second and third quarters. The Saints clawed their way back to a 34-30 deficit behind Brees, who completed a play-off-record 39 passes in 60 attempts for 404 yards and a pair of TDs. But the beginning of the end for New Orleans came on a second-down play with 3:22 remaining called "17 Power," as Seahawks RB Marshawn Lynch broke at least six tackles on his way to a highlight-reel 67-yard TD romp.

PLAYERS OF THE GAME Hasselbeck and Lynch deserve equal share of the hero's wreath for the Seahawks. Hasselbeck had his best performance of the season by far, completing 22-of-35 passes for 272 yards and registering a 113.0 passer rating. Aside from an interception on his third pass of the game, Hasselbeck was virtually flawless. Lynch's 131 yards on the ground on 19 carries was the first 100-yard rushing performance by the Seahawks this season. Lynch finished one yard short of the franchise playoff record that Shaun Alexander set in the NFC championship game in January 2006.

QUOTABLE Lynch's back-breaking TD run drew high praise from both sides. "That was a beastly run by him," Saints FS Darren Sharper said. "He had a lot more hunger than we did trying to bring him down." Added Seahawks backup DT Craig Terrill: "I've never seen such a great run. That will go down as one of the best runs ever, especially considering the situation."



LaDainian Tomlinson's second TD run capped a drive that lasted nearly 10 minutes.

JETS 17, COLTS 16

SUMMARY Jets head coach Rex Ryan finally can say he has beaten Peyton Manning. Ryan's Jets avenged their loss in the 2009 AFC championship game by edging the Colts 17-16 behind a 32-yard Nick Folk field goal as time expired at Lucas Oil Stadium on Saturday night. PK Adam Vinatieri, whose three field goals accounted for all of the Colts' second-half scoring, boomed a 50-yard field goal with 53 seconds remaining to give Indianapolis a 16-14 lead. But Jets CB Antonio Cromartie returned the ensuing kickoff 47 yards to the Jets' 46-yard line, putting QB Mark Sanchez in position to win the game. Sanchez (18-of-31 passing for 189 yards and one interception) made three key completions — two to WR Braylon Edwards — to set up Folk for the game-winning kick. Manning (18-of-26 passing, 225 yards, one TD) found WR Pierre Garcon on a 57-yard scoring strike in the second quarter to give the Colts a 7-0 halftime lead. But the Jets held the ball for more than 15 minutes on their first two possessions of the second half, finding the endzone twice on a pair of one-yard LaDainian Tomlinson runs.

PLAYERS OF THE GAME Tomlinson (16-82-2), Shonn Greene (19-70-0) and the entire Jets offensive line wore down the Colts' "D" in the second half after watching Sanchez struggle with his accuracy in the first two quarters. The two RBs combined for 78 yards in the final 30 minutes, forcing Manning to watch helplessly from the sideline as New York marched the ball up and down the field. Cromartie, who gave up the long TD reception to Garcon, was very valuable on special teams, returning two kick-offs for 88 yards after Brad Smith suffered a groin injury in the first half.

QUOTABLE "It was a herculean effort by our team," a jubilant Ryan said. "I'm thankful I finally got to beat Peyton Manning. ... I wasn't going to take the same butt-kicking I usually take from them." Added Colts head coach Jim Caldwell, "Our standards are high around here. We got into the playoffs, but we believe we're here to win championships."



The Chiefs had no answer for Ravens TE Todd Heap, who had 10 catches for 108 yards.

RAVENS 30, CHIEFS 7

SUMMARY The Chiefs looked every bit the Ravens' equal during the first half of Sunday's wild-card matchup at Arrowhead Stadium, trailing 10-7 at the midway point. But the second half was a different story. Baltimore asserted itself in the final 30 minutes, controlling the clock and forcing four turnovers to triumph 30-7 and move on to face the Steelers next week. With the Chiefs bottling up the Ravens' running game, QB Joe Flacco went to the air, completing 25-of-34 passes for 265 yards and two touchdowns. TE Todd Heap emerged as his favorite target, catching 10 passes for 108 yards. While Chiefs RB Jamaal Charles had success on the ground early, ripping off a 41-yard TD run, K.C. went away from him in the second half, putting the ball in QB Matt Cassel's hands. That played right into Baltimore's favor, as it forced him into three interceptions. Cassel finished with just 70 passing yards, and Pro Bowl WR Dwayne Bowe did not make a catch. A 10-minute, 20-second fourth-quarter drive resulting in a Willis McGahee TD run sealed the fate for Kansas City, which set an NFL record by losing its seventh consecutive playoff game.

PLAYERS OF THE GAME While the Chiefs' cornerbacks were able to do a good job covering the Ravens' wideouts, Heap came through with a monster effort, constantly beating safeties and linebackers to haul in 10 receptions, both a career-high and a franchise postseason record. Flacco, whose numbers in his previous five playoff starts had been ugly, was also sensational, finishing with a 115.4 passer rating and making plays with his feet, as well, running for 26 yards. His efficiency on third down helped Baltimore consistently move the chains and hold the ball for 41:44.

QUOTABLE "They just gave me the team ball for my family," said Ravens FS Ed Reed, whose brother went missing on Jan. 7 after reportedly jumping into the Mississippi River. "My family kept me focused. My older brother called me and told me, 'Do what you do. You handle your business, we'll take care of everything over here.'"



Rookie RB James Starks gave the Packers' running game a big boost with 123 yards.

PACKERS 21, EAGLES 16

SUMMARY When preseason predictions had the Packers making a playoff run, no one expected contributions from Tom Crabtree, James Jones and James Starks in the postseason. But those three, among others, stepped up in Sunday's 21-16 wild-card victory over the Eagles in Philadelphia. QB Aaron Rodgers tossed three TD passes, opening the scoring with a seven-yard toss to Crabtree. The Packers went up 14-0 on Jones' nine-yard catch before a David Akers field goal got Philly on the board before halftime. But Akers missed two field goals on the afternoon, and those misses would come back to bite the Eagles. Vick turned it on in the second half, finding Jason Avant for a 24-yard TD pass, narrowing Green Bay's lead to 14-10. But on the ensuing drive, RB Brandon Jackson weaved his way to a 16-yard catch-and-run to put the Pack up 21-10. Vick wasn't done, sneaking into the endzone with 4:02 to go, but the two-point conversion failed. After a Packers three-and-out, he brought the Eagles to the Packers' 27-yard line with 40 seconds left before being picked off by Packers CB Tramon Williams in the endzone. Starks was a revelation, with 123 yards on 23 carries.

PLAYERS OF THE GAME Rodgers looked great in directing his first career playoff win, completing 18-of-27 passes for 180 yards and three scores, good for a 122.5 passer rating. He received a big boost from a rushing attack that was led by Starks, who had the Packers' longest play in the game — a 27-yard run that helped set up the team's first touchdown. The Packers' "D" sacked Vick three times and held him to 33 yards rushing. OLB Clay Matthews had one of those sacks. Williams gets an honorable mention for his game-clinching interception.

QUOTABLE "I feel like I got greedy and took a shot at the endzone. I didn't throw the ball I wanted and got picked. It's not the way I wanted to go out, but I went down swinging. I have to learn from it," Vick said about the late pick. Added Rodgers, "I never felt like there was a monkey on my back. I'm just so proud of these guys."

AUDIBLES

The following quotes are from NFL scouts, coaches and front-office personnel, speaking on the condition of anonymity.



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"Can you think of a team in the AFC North that has ever won without a top-10 running back? You have to go back a long time. The reason Pittsburgh fared so well this year was because **(Rashard) Mendenhall** came on. **Ray Rice** is one of the best in the league. **(Peyton) Hillis** is OK in Cleveland, but he's not great. **(Cedric) Benson** was top-10 last year, but they got away from running it and he was not as effective this year. To counter good running backs, you need strong linebackers. You have to go back to the Steel Curtain — before free agency and the salary cap — to find a group of linebackers that have been as good as **(Lawrence) Timmons**, **(James) Farrior**, **(LaMarr) Woodley** and **(James) Harrison**. Those guys are great. There are none better in the league. You have to give the Rooney family credit. They have a strong, tough running game and a tough, hard-nosed defense — it fits the city of Pittsburgh. They never forget who they are or what they came from, and it sells tickets."

■ "If you want to beat the Patriots, you need to look at the job Cleveland did on them. The one thing **(Eric) Mangini** definitely knows is how to beat New England. They had a phenomenal game plan. I've never seen **Tom Brady** so confused. They had 11 guys standing, and (Brady) had no idea who was coming and who was dropping. No team is good playing from behind, especially if the (opponent) can run at you. **Colt McCoy** made a few plays early, and **(Peyton) Hillis** ran at them. That is the winning formula to beat New England. It's a copycat league, and you have to know where you could pull from."

■ "Coaching salaries really got out of control when **Nick Saban** came to the Dolphins. If you remember, that is the first time there was a position coach making next to a million when they hired **Hudson Houck** to coach the offensive line. That is when coordinators started going over the million-dollar mark. What did Washington pay **Gregg Williams** and **Al Saunders** — in the high (\$2 millions)? It got really high, and that is what kicked up **(Jack) Del Rio** and **Lovie (Smith)** and those guys. Assistants were making as much as head coaches."

■ "Coaches remember what a player did. Personnel guys are supposed to be on top of coaches to remember what (players) can do. Every team has different power structures. What you have to realize with coaches is that very few of them can sepa-

rate the emotion."

■ "The identity of your team can change during the course of the year depending on who is healthy, who is playing and what is working — and most importantly, what gives you the best opportunity to win. Look at Philadelphia. **Kevin Kolb** was going to be the quarterback in training camp. Who could have foreseen what was coming with **Michael Vick**? That changed the Eagles' entire approach. What is really interesting is how good coaches can adapt. A player like Vick can change both sides of the ball. If your offense can score at will, you can afford to be more aggressive on defense. Or you may just not want to give up big chunks of yardage and play smart and sound. If you have a dominating defense, it becomes more important not to have turnovers on the short side of the field, so you may want the offense to play more conservatively on their own side of the 50, more like Pittsburgh does."

■ "What **(Bill) Belichick** does better than anyone — he drafted two tight ends with entirely different skill sets. **(Aaron) Hernandez** motions and splits out. **(Rob) Gronkowski** can block in-line and run you over after the catch. They do nothing the same, but they both had great rookie years. It's just like his three-headed halfback — he has the pounder, the slasher and the third-down back. (Belichick) is the master of playing to his players' strengths."

NFList

First time's not always the charm for postseason QBs

By Kevin Fishbain and Eli Kaberon
Associate editors

When the Bears' offense runs onto Soldier Field for the first time Sunday afternoon, it will be a new experience for Jay Cutler.

The Chicago quarterback will be making his postseason debut against the Seahawks. Cutler and Matt Cassel of the Chiefs were the only two starting quarterbacks in the postseason tournament who hadn't played in the playoffs prior to 2011. The experience will be memorable and the challenge will be daunting, but victory isn't impossible. The other 10 starting QBs from this year's playoffs were 5-5 in their first playoff starts.

In Cassel's first playoff start, he fell victim to the Ravens' defense in the second half. He threw for just 70 yards with three interceptions in a 30-7 loss.

With Cassel's Chiefs and three other teams now eliminated, here is how the seven remaining QBs with experience did in their playoff debuts, ranked by the number of postseason starts each has made.

1. Tom Brady (14-4) — Brady got his playoff career off to quite a start in one of the more memorable games in NFL postseason history — the "Tuck Rule" game on Jan. 19, 2002. With the Patriots trailing the Raiders 13-10 late in the fourth quarter of a game in which snow fell throughout, Charles Woodson sacked Brady, knocking the ball loose and seeing Oakland recover it. But after officials reviewed the play, the fumble was ruled an incomplete pass. Two Adam Vinatieri field goals later, Brady was en route to the first of three Super Bowl titles with a 16-13 OT win. Brady's six-yard rush was the Patriots' only touchdown of the day. He threw the ball 52 times for 312 yards.

2. Ben Roethlisberger (8-2) — Roethlisberger had won every start of his rookie career and was in jeopardy of suffering his first loss on Jan. 15, 2005, against the Jets. His four-yard touchdown pass to Hines Ward tied the game in the fourth quarter, but his interception a few minutes later almost spelled the end of the Steelers. A Doug Brien missed field goal as time expired gave the Steelers new life, and Roethlisberger led them downfield to set up Jeff Reed's game-winning kick in overtime.

3. Matt Hasselbeck (5-5) — After Hasselbeck was traded to Seattle from Green Bay in 2001, revenge was on the mind of the Seahawks QB on Jan. 4, 2004. Playing at Lambeau Field against Brett Favre and his former team, Hasselbeck performed well in his playoff debut, throwing for 305 yards and setting up Shaun Alexander for three one-yard TD runs. The final of those three scores pushed the game into overtime, where Hasselbeck became a part of NFL lore. Seattle won the OT coin toss, and when the ref asked the Seahawks' QB if Seattle wanted to kick or receive, he answered, "We want the ball and we're going to score." Fifteen minutes later,



AFP PHOTOS

Tom Brady's first playoff start came in one of the more infamous playoff games in NFL history.

Hasselbeck did throw a score — to Packers CB Al Harris for a 52-yard pick-six, handing Green Bay a 33-27 win.

4. Joe Flacco (4-2) — Flacco's first playoff appearance was not memorable, but he got the "W." Leading the Ravens in his rookie season, Flacco completed just 9-of-23 passes for 135 yards in a 27-9 upset win over the Dolphins two years ago. Flacco did rush five yards for the game's final score.

5. Mark Sanchez (3-1) — As a rookie starter, Sanchez didn't have to do much in the Jets' 24-14 win over the Bengals last January. But he was accurate and protected the football, completing 12-of-15 passes for 182 yards and a touchdown. Sanchez went on to lead the Jets to another upset win in San Diego before falling to the Colts in the AFC championship game.

6. Aaron Rodgers (1-1) — Rodgers learned in January 2010 a harsh lesson of the playoffs: Even the smallest mistakes can lose a game. The Green Bay passer was outstanding, throwing for 423 yards and four TDs in regulation at Arizona. Yet, it was an overtime fumble that deflected off the QB's foot into the hands of Cardinals LB Karlos Dansby and was returned 17 yards for a touchdown that lost Rodgers' postseason debut for the Packers.

7. Matt Ryan (0-1) — After leading his Falcons to the playoffs in his rookie year of 2008 with an 11-5 record, Ryan looked to have an easy draw against the 9-7 Cardinals, who had staggered into the postseason. But Arizona proved to be the better team, harassing Ryan all day. The QB threw two interceptions, was sacked for a safety and lost a fumble that was returned 27 yards for a TD in a 30-24 Cardinals win.

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