



2002 NFL SEASON
SIXTH SENSE SPORTS
WEEKS 16-21

WEEK 16

Picks are on a major roll over the past four weeks, going 24-11 +35.70%. Hopefully the final two weeks of the regular season will be just as good as the past four weeks. The thinking is very good right now in the NFL.

Home team in caps. All records against the spread unless otherwise noted.

League averages for comparison to the stats that will be listed below.

Yards Per Rush (YPR) 4.2

Yards Per Pass (YPS) 6.0

Yards Per Play (YPPL) 5.2

Miami –3 MINNESOTA 45

Lost in Minnesota's upset win over New Orleans last week was their total domination of the Saints. Minnesota gained 439 yards at 6.9 yppl to only 299 yards for NO at 5.1 yppl. That followed the great performance by the Vikings at GB the week before. For Miami, they are coming off of consecutive wins over Oakland and Chicago. Miami's offense is average, gaining 5.3 yppl against 5.3 yppl while their defense is now rated as the second best defense in the league according to my ratings, allowing 4.8 yppl against 5.4 yppl. They'll face what has slowly but surely become the league's third best offense, gaining 5.7 yppl against 5.2 yppl. They'll also face the league's worse defense that allows 6.0 yppl against 5.1 yppl. That defense has improved the past couple of weeks but it still easily the worse defense in the league. Miami has struggled on the road this year, losing in their last game at Buffalo, falling at the Jets and Green Bay (without Jay Fielder), winning in OT at Denver, getting blown out against Kansas City and winning by eight at Indianapolis. It's pretty commonly known that the Miami defense doesn't play as well on the road as they do at home. Their defense is allowing just 12 points per game at home this year while allowing over 26 points on the road. Their median defense on the road is 23 points allowed, so they have been consistently poor on the road. I also mentioned that Minnesota's offense is now the third best offense in the league. Miami has faced the league's best offense in the league, KC, and they allowed 48 points in that game. They also played the league's second best offense last week, in Oakland. Miami only allows 12 points at home but they allowed a good offense 17 points last week. So, as good as Miami's defense is, I expect the Vikings offense to get their points this week. Minnesota qualifies in a number of fantastic situations this week. They qualify in a home momentum situation that is 74-41-2 and another 150-102-10 momentum situation. They also qualify in a third momentum situation that is 41-11-1. In addition, Minnesota qualifies in a scheduling situation that is 151-85-8 (although only 3-7 this year) and they qualify in a last home game situation that is 61-30-4. Vikings are also a turn-over table play, which is 58-42-1 this year. They don't qualify in any of the better subsets of that situation. Mike Tice said a couple of weeks ago when asked why his team has the success against the Packers that they have, that his team runs schemes that just match up very well against the Packers. He then stated that when Denny Green was in Minnesota, his schemes always set up well against Miami too. I expect the Vikings to run some of those schemes against the Dolphins defense. My numbers make this game a pick 'em and those numbers are now 24-17 the past six weeks when differing from the line by three or more points. I expect Minnesota to give Miami everything they can handle and then some this week. Vikings haven't lost a home game by more than seven points this year and other than the Carolina game, they were in all of the rest right up to the end, including losing two of them in overtime. I also have a 325-241-18 situation that plays on the under in this game (26-19 TY) but my final numbers indicate around 48 points being scored. **MINNESOTA 27 MIAMI 21**

San Francisco –4 ARIZONA 41

SF lost last week to GB and looked pretty bad in doing so. In fact, they actually made my Packers defense look reasonably good in that game. SF was out gained 302 yards to only 263 yards, although 4.5 yppl to 4.6 yppl. Now, with that loss, SF has absolutely nothing to play for. They are locked in to host a playoff game against a wild card team but trail the Packers by two games with two games remaining and won't win any tie breakers with them, Philly (who they also lost to) nor TB. With Terrell Owens already hurting, I don't expect him to get much, if any playing time. In addition, Jeff Garcia was hurt on their final drive last week when he ran into Gilbert Brown on the sidelines. Garcia may start but will probably not play too long in this game. SF may also rest many other starters in this game, including both running backs who have been banged up the past couple of weeks. As I mentioned last week, SF has now become just an average team. They are now gaining just 5.3 yppl against 5.3 yppl and allowing

5.4 yppl against 5.4 yppl. They'll take on Arizona, a team that I thought had quit. But I forgot one important item that can wake a team up in a hurry. Put your team on a national televised game and all of a sudden, you have a chance of waking up. Arizona played a great game against the Rams last week, coming from 17 points behind, only to fall two points short of winning their game. Their offense gained 378 yards at 6.4 yppl while allowing 366 yards at 6.0 yppl. This game is another national televised game and I expect another solid effort from Arizona against a less than interested SF team. The Arizona numbers are not good this year. They gain only 4.7 yppl against 5.2 yppl while allowing 5.7 yppl against 5.3 yppl. But they have an awful lot of young guys playing that are playing for jobs, while SF is just trying to get through the final two weeks without any further injuries. Arizona qualifies in a scheduling situation that is 151-85-8 as well as a last home game situation that is 61-30-4. They are also a turnover table play which is 58-42-1 this year. My numbers make this line a pick 'em, giving us value along with the solid situations on Arizona. I like Arizona to stage the upset against an uninterested SF team. **ARIZONA 24 SAN FRANCISCO 20**

Philadelphia –6.5 DALLAS 37

Well, I expected Dave Campo to possibly find a way to lose their game last week, just like almost every week, but I expected his team to at least keep it close. It got out of hand so fast that he didn't even have time to mess things up. It doesn't get much easier this week with Philly coming to town. I'm not sure I've seen such a pasting and dominance one team has shown over another as Philly has the past couple of years over this Dallas team. It was 44-13 earlier this year, 36-3 and 40-18 last year, 16-13 and 41-14 the year before. Having said all of that and even though I think Philadelphia is easily the odds on favorite to win the SB this year, I am on Dallas in this game. Dallas is another team who plays terrific defense, just as Philly, and usually plays their home games very close, with the largest loss this season by four points against SF two weeks ago. The Philly offense is gaining 5.3 yppl against 5.1 yppl while their defense is allowing just 4.7 yppl against 5.0 yppl. But their offense will be challenged by a Dallas defense that is allowing 4.8 yppl against 5.1 yppl. The Dallas offense is below average, gaining just 4.8 yppl against 5.1 yppl. Dallas should have more success in this game simply because they won't have to defend Donovan McNabb. Dallas qualifies in a contrary situation this week that is 60-32-2 and they also qualify in a scheduling situation which is 151-85-8. Even more importantly, they qualify in my best situation overall, which is a fundamental situation that is a remarkable 108-37-7 including 8-3-1 this year. They are also a turnover table play which is 58-42-1 this year, although they don't qualify in any of the better subsets. My numbers actually make Dallas a 1.5 point favorite in this game and remember when my numbers have differed from the line by three or more points, they are now 24-17 the past six weeks. Despite the past dominance of Philadelphia in this game, without Donovan McNabb, I expect Dallas to have a little more success and they are in some great situations along with a lot of value. **DALLAS 20 PHILADELPHIA 17**

GREEN BAY –6.5 Buffalo 43

The Pack did what they had to do last week in beating SF. They played a pretty good game, allowing SF just 263 yards and 4.6 yppl. For the season, GB is now averaging 5.4 yppl against 5.2 yppl while their defense is allowing 5.2 yppl against 5.1 yppl. That makes their offense above average and their defense below average. While the defense is below average, it is their rush defense that has failed them, allowing 5.1 ypr against 4.3 ypr, easily being the league's worse defense. Seattle gives up 5.0 ypr but against 4.6 ypr so their numbers aren't quite as bad as GB's. As bad as their rush defense has been, their pass defense has been excellent again this year, allowing just 5.2 yps against 5.6 yps. The Bills offense is gaining 5.5 yppl against 5.3 yppl. Everyone thinks it is their great passing offense but they actually are only gaining 6.1 yps against 6.1 yps, making their passing offense just average. Their rushing offense is now gaining 4.5 ypr against 4.2 ypr, which makes their rushing offense pretty solid. The Bills defense is also an average defense, allowing just 5.3 yppl against 5.3 yppl. I say just because most people think their defense is below average. I expect GB, at home, in December, to be able to move the ball pretty well in this game. Buffalo qualifies in a negative scheduling situation that is 110-165-9 but they are a turnover table play but don't fit into any of the better subsets. My numbers favor GB by about 4 points in this game. GB has faced three offenses that are as good or better than Buffalo's offense this year. They have allowed Minnesota to score 31 points, 22 points, New Orleans to score 35 points and Atlanta to score 34 points. The Atlanta and Minnesota 22 point effort were in GB. I expect Buffalo to be able to put up more than 20 points in this game. Buffalo has faced some pretty good defenses this year. When they have faced defenses more in line with GB's, they have scored 31 and 13 against the Jets, 45 against Minnesota, 33 against Chicago, 24 against Detroit, only 16 against KC and 20

against SD. I expect them to move the ball here and my numbers indicate about 52 points being scored in this game. GB has scored a minimum of at least 24 points in every home game this year with the exception of the Carolina game. But Carolina has a pretty good defense, much better than Buffalo's. If GB can get at least 24 points here and Buffalo should score at least 20, this game should go over the total rather easily. I'll lean towards Buffalo here because of their balanced offense and the lack of a rush defense on GB's part but the best play here is the over.

GREEN BAY 29 BUFFALO 24

ATLANTA -10.5 Detroit 43.5

Detroit played a very solid game last week against TB, especially considering they lost Joey Harrington and had to finish with Mike McMahon. They averaged 5.5 ypr and gained 144 yards rushing against the league's best defense. Overall, they out gained TB 6.0 yppf to 5.4 yppf. TB did gain 376 yards to only 292 for Detroit but the yppf are the more important factors. For Atlanta, no surprise that they were in a tussle with Seattle last week, actually losing the game in overtime. I had Seattle against what I think is a little over rated Atlanta team that just shouldn't be laying this many points to any team. Atlanta is just above average on offense, gaining 5.2 yppf against 5.1 yppf and still well below average on defense, allowing 5.4 yppf against 5.1 yppf. Detroit remains below average on both sides of the ball, gaining just 4.6 yppf against 5.2 yppf and allowing 5.3 yppf against 5.1 yppf. I've talked for weeks now about a great contrary situation that has also done very well this year and Detroit qualifies in that situation that is now 285-203-11 and 14-10 this year. They are also a turnover table play although they don't qualify in any of the better subsets. Those turnover plays are now 58-42-1 this year, enjoying another outstanding season for something that gives you well over 100 plays per season. My numbers make Atlanta only a 9.5 point favorite in this game, giving value to Detroit as well. I don't have enough ammunition to play Detroit here but I think they are the correct side to play. **ATLANTA 26 DETROIT 20**

CAROLINA -3 Chicago 36

Not a whole lot of interest for me in this game. Both teams are just playing out the season with not much on the line except a better draft pick for the loser. Both teams are below average on offense with Chicago gaining just 4.6 yppf against 5.3 yppf while Carolina gains just 4.6 yppf against 5.2 yppf. On defense, the Carolina defense is still pretty solid, allowing just 4.7 yppf against 5.1 yppf while Chicago is allowing 5.4 yppf against 5.3 yppf, making their defense below average. That would seem to be the advantage in this game. Carolina does qualify as a turnover table play and they also qualify in a subset of that which is 120-62-4 as long as they remain favored by three or less. The best play here is probably the under. I have a very solid 64-31-3 situation that plays on the under and my total points projected for this game is just 32 points. My numbers only make Carolina a one point favorite in this game but I will lean with Carolina because of the good situation and the better defense and suggest the under here. This line is pretty low and low enough to scare me off of the under but this should be a low scoring game.

CAROLINA 14 CHICAGO 10

New Orleans -7 CINCINNATI 48

The more and more the Saints play, the more they become exposed as a fraud team. No doubt the Saints can move the ball on offense but their defense leaves a lot to be desired. They are now allowing 5.5 yppf against 5.1 yppf after allowing the Vikings to gain a whopping 439 yards of offense at 6.9 yppf. Their offense is gaining 5.4 yppf against 5.1 yppf and they should have some success against a Bengal defense that is allowing 5.6 yppf against 5.0 yppf. The Cincinnati offense is still below average, gaining just 4.9 yppf against 5.0 yppf but they have played much better the past eight weeks. Very tough to lay points on the road, especially seven points, when your defense has allowed at least 20 points in every game this season, and at least 23 points in every game on the road since their second road game of the year. The Cincinnati offense had scored at least 20 points in seven straight games before only scoring 15 points last week against Jacksonville. The Bengal's qualify in a contrary situation that is 52-19-1 and they are also a turnover table play, which is 58-42-1 this year. They also qualify in two different subsets under the turnover table play that are 62-28-3 and 120-62-4. My numbers make NO only a five point favorite, giving us some value on Cincinnati as well. Cincinnati is only 1-13 and has only covered in three of those games this year but the situations, value and a poor road defense give them an excellent chance to get the cover this week. I have a predicted total of 64 points in this game, making it an excellent choice for an over but I also have an excellent 46-19-2 (4-2 TY) under situation on this game that is enough to keep me off of the over. **NEW ORLEANS 33**

CINCINNATI 31

INDIANAPOLIS -5 NY Giants 41.5

I went against the Giants last week and lost badly but my feelings about the Giants are still the same. I think they are a very average team against a pretty good Colts team. The Giants are averaging 5.3 yppl against 5.2 yppl on offense, making them just above average and allowing 5.0 yppl against 5.1 yppl, also making them just above average. The Colts defense is about average, allowing 5.0 yppl against 5.0 yppl but their offense is doing very well, gaining 5.4 yppl against 5.0 yppl. Both teams are weaker against the run than they are against the pass, but both teams are also weaker running the ball than they are throwing the ball. The Giants qualify in a negative letdown situation that is 110-165-9. Indy is also a turnover table play although they don't qualify in any of the better subsets. They are as close as you could come to qualifying in a 71-30-3 fundamental rushing situation. My numbers make them a five point favorite so the line seems to be fair. This game also qualifies in a 325-241-18 (26-19 TY) under situation and my final numbers total only 36 points but this game also qualifies in a statistical situation which gives the game a good chance to go over the total. Better to pass on the total and I have a strong lean towards the Colts. **INDIANAPOLIS 23 NY GIANTS 13**

Tennessee -3 JACKSONVILLE 43.5

I am now 7-1 betting on or against the Titans this week. Many weeks I have been on Tennessee and stated the numbers just don't favor Tennessee but they are playing better than their numbers. But I have also won when going against the Titans as well. I love the announcers who are all talking about Tennessee all of a sudden. I have been talking about them for some time now and think they are playing great but not this week. They fall into some absolutely horrible situations this week. This is a 4% game for me. Let me make it clear that 4% plays are only 1% more than 3% plays and should be played as such. In addition, just because I am making this game a 4% play doesn't mean that Jacksonville will blow out Tennessee. What it does mean is the situations are ripe for a Jacksonville victory. Also, the line is such that we could be behind in the end, and still backdoor this game. That, to me, is what a bigger play is all about. The chance to cover even if our team doesn't play up to expectations because the value is clearly on our side. On to the game. These teams are pretty close to each other, statistically, with Tennessee gaining 5.2 yppl against 5.0 yppl and Jacksonville gains 5.2 yppl against 5.1 yppl. On defense, both teams allow 0.2 yards more than their opponents are averaging. Jacksonville runs the ball extremely well, gaining 4.6 ypr against 4.2 ypr while Tennessee is just average stopping the run, allowing 4.0 ypr against 4.0 ypr. Jacksonville qualifies in a home momentum situation that is 74-41-2 and a scheduling situation which is 151-85-8. They also qualify in a last home game situation that is 61-30-4. Tennessee is a turnover table play but they don't qualify in any of the better subsets. What makes this play so special is Jacksonville qualifies in THREE fundamental rushing situations. That means they should control the line of scrimmage. Those three situations are 105-52-6 (8-5 TY), 48-11-3 (7-3 TY) and the absolute best situation in the business that is 108-37-7 (8-3-1 TY). All three situations are clicking like clock work this year. My numbers also make Jacksonville an eight point favorite in this game, giving us a full 11 points of value. Remember, when these numbers are at least three points off of the line they are 24-17 the past six weeks. Not into technical or fundamental or value. Then let me give you some other ammunition. Jacksonville hasn't lost a game at home this year by more than three points. That includes games against Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, NY Jets and Indianapolis. For Tennessee, as great of a run as they have been on, they have really struggled on the road. The Titans have lost at Dallas, lost at Oakland, won at Cincinnati only because Cincinnati couldn't get the ball into the end zone from the one yard line at the end of the game, won at Indianapolis but were out gained by 200 yards in that game, lost at Baltimore and staged a miracle comeback to win by three points at the Giants. Last but not least, Jacksonville hasn't lost by more than three points at home against Tennessee in over five years and only by seven in their first two years of existence. Way, way too many situations favoring Jacksonville this week. **JACKSONVILLE 27 TENNESSEE 14**

KANSAS CITY -2 San Diego 44

Pretty hard to get a read on this game. Probably no Priest Holmes for Kansas City and Tony Richardson is also out. They also have two banged up wide receivers. KC has won five consecutive years here against SD. KC still brings the league's best offense, gaining 6.4 yppl against 5.3 yppl but their defense still allows 5.9 yppl against 5.4 yppl. SD runs the ball very well, gaining 4.5 ypr against 4.2 ypr and KC doesn't stop the run very well, allowing 4.7 ypr

against 4.4 ypr. The SD defense is pretty suspect too, allowing 5.6 yppl against 5.4 yppl, which should allow KC to move the ball pretty well too. I have situations on both sides in this game and my numbers favor KC by seven points. They also predict 52 points being scored in this game. Without Holmes and the other numerous injuries, it's too hard to take KC or the over. But I would lean those ways in this game. **KANSAS CITY 31 SAN DIEGO 21**

WASHINGTON -6.5 Houston 37

Hmmm, 8, -30, -16, 5, 3, -6. Those are the final margins for the Redskins this year at home. Pretty hard to lay six points in a game when you haven't won by that at home in over two months. I realize it's Houston but they still play very good defense that will make it very hard for Washington to move the ball and score, ultimately making it pretty hard to cover six points. The Washington offense is below average, gaining just 4.9 yppl against 5.2 yppl and the Houston defense is allowing just 4.9 yppl against 5.2 yppl. On the other side, Washington is still playing very good defense, allowing just 4.9 yppl against 5.3 yppl and the Houston offense is just horrible, gaining just 3.9 yppl against 5.1 yppl. The Redskins are without Stephen Davis for the rest of the year and Spurrier will start looking at some younger players for next year. Houston qualifies in a contrary situation that is 285-203-11 (14-10 TY) and a similar situation that is 163-104-5 (7-3 TY). Washington is a turnover table play but they don't qualify in any of the better situations. While I think Houston is a pretty good play here, I think the better play is probably the under. This game qualifies in a 64-31-3 under situation and they also qualify in a statistical situation that suggest the under is the right play here. Look for Houston to keep it close in a low scoring game. **WASHINGTON 17 HOUSTON 14**

SEATTLE -1.5 St. Louis 45.5

Not much interest here for me. We saw the Rams sort of go through the motions last week while Seattle seems to still be playing pretty hard. Who knows what you'll get out of Marshall Faulk and not knowing if he will play a significant role in this game makes it hard to take or go against the Rams. Both offenses are above average and both defenses are below average. That would suggest a high scoring game but I have a 325-241-18 (26-19 TY) situation that plays on the under in this game. Also, my final numbers suggest only 44 points will be scored in this game but I have a feeling many more points will be scored. But you don't make a living betting by taking the over when you have such a strong situation on the under. Seattle would qualify in some pretty good situations if they were an underdog in this game and the Rams do qualify in a very good 485-375-34 fundamental rushing situation but not any of the better subsets. The Rams are also a turnover table play but again not qualifying in any of the better subsets. My numbers favor Seattle by 2.5 points in this game. The fundamentals favor the Rams. The technical situations favor Seattle if the line would move a little. The team that seems to be more motivated right now are the Seahawks and I will lean their way in a weak lean. **SEATTLE 24 ST LOUIS 20**

OAKLAND -3.5 Denver 47

Many will make the move to play the revenging Broncos this week. After all, Mike Shanahan has dominated the Raiders since coming to Denver, with the exception of the game earlier this year and one other game. But I believe the correct side here is the Raiders. While the Denver defense is still very good, allowing 5.0 yppl against 5.5 yppl, the Raiders defense doesn't back down to anybody, allowing just 5.1 yppl against 5.4 yppl. On offense, the Broncos offense is pretty solid, gaining 5.7 yppl against 5.4 yppl but the Raiders offense rates as the second best offense in my ratings, gaining 6.0 yppl against 5.4 yppl. Denver qualifies in a negative letdown situation that is 110-165-9 and Oakland qualifies in a last home game situation that is 61-30-4. Also, if this line would go to three, they would qualify in a 108-37-7 fundamental rushing situation. Denver does qualify as a turnover table play but not in any of the better subsets. My numbers favor Oakland by four points, making this line plenty fair. Denver has struggled against the three best teams they have played this year, losing to Miami, Indianapolis and Oakland. I see the same thing happening here. I also have a 325-241-18 under situation on this game and getting close to playoff time could mean a lower scoring game than the total indicates. **OAKLAND 27 DENVER 14**

BALTIMORE -2.5 Cleveland 40

Big game for both teams here, especially for Baltimore, who stands the better chance to make the playoffs if they can get a win here. A win here and a Pittsburgh loss at TB on Monday night sets up a final week showdown be-

tween these two teams with the winner going to the playoffs. I don't have any situations for either team. My numbers indicate Baltimore should be favored by four points. Baltimore lost here last year to Cleveland after destroying the Browns the previous two years to that. They also defeated Cleveland earlier this year. The Cleveland offense is average, gaining 5.1 yppf against 5.1 yppf while the Ravens defense is above average, allowing just 5.0 yppf against 5.1 yppf. On offense, the Ravens have struggled, gaining just 4.7 yppf against 5.1 yppf but they'll face a Browns defense that is below average, allowing 5.3 yppf against 5.1 yppf. The Ravens like to run the ball and they should find some success against a Browns defense that is allowing 4.3 ypr against 4.0 ypr. Baltimore is just average running the ball but should be able to open some holes against Cleveland. Better games on the card but I favor Baltimore. **BALTIMORE 22 CLEVELAND 18**

NEW ENGLAND -3.5 NY Jets 41.5

Let's hope NE loses this game and Miami wins (but not by too much) so we can put NE to bed. We won't have to hear about how they get no respect, blah, blah, blah. They were absolutely pummeled last week at Tennessee, getting out gained 365 yards to just 176 yards and 4.9 yppf against 3.7 yppf. The Jets certainly didn't do themselves any favors last week by losing to the Bears, but they actually played a decent game, gaining 334 yards to just 266 for the Bears and 5.8 yppf against 4.7 yppf. The NE defense is still solid, allowing just 5.1 yppf against 5.4 yppf but their offense is below average, gaining just 5.1 yppf against 5.3 yppf. While the Jets defense is below average, their offense is above average, gaining 5.4 yppf against 5.3 yppf. The Jets do qualify in a bounce back situation this week that is 68-37-2 and they are a turnover table play but they don't qualify in any of the better subsets. Past history has been pretty kind to the Jets here, having won four straight and having lost only three of the past ten games by more than three points in NE. My numbers favor NE by only 2.5 points and the situations favor the Jets. Two over rated teams and I think the underdog gets the victory. **NY JETS 21 NEW ENGLAND 16**

TAMPA BAY -4 Pittsburgh 39.5

Well, bleeding Green and Gold means I am cheering against TB this week but unfortunately I think the right side this week is TB. I have to admit the Steelers, who are only 1-1 the past two weeks, are playing terrific defense all of a sudden. Granted it was against Houston and Carolina but they limited Houston to 47 total yards of offense and last week Carolina to 131 yards and 2.4 yppf. But let's face it. They gained over 400 yards against Houston and over 300 yards last week but only 4.4 yppf and 4.5 yppf the past two weeks. So, the yardage has been mostly because they have had the ball, not because they have been moving the ball in large chunks. Their defense may play pretty well again this week, facing a TB offense that is only gaining 5.0 yppf against 5.2 yppf. Pittsburgh is now only allowing 4.8 yppf against 5.1 yppf. But I doubt they will have much success moving the ball. Their offense is gaining 5.5 yppf against 5.2 yppf but they'll face the league's best defense, allowing just 4.1 yppf against 5.1 yppf. TB qualifies in a Monday night momentum situation that is 24-6-2 and a last home game situation that is 61-30-4. Pittsburgh also qualifies in a negative letdown situation that is 110-165-9. The Steelers are a turnover table play but they don't qualify in any of the better subsets. The Steelers biggest success on offense this year has come via the pass, averaging 6.5 yps against 6.0 yps but they'll face an outstanding pass defense that is allowing just 4.3 yps against 5.8 yps. My numbers favor TB by seven points indicating there is plenty of value on the Bucs as well. TB is now 25-4-1 when laying less than five points at home or a dog, including 3-0 this year, in their last 30 situations. Give a solid defense a short number at home and they get the job done. I also have a 325-241-18 (26-19 TY) situation on the under in this game and a statistical situation that suggests this game will go under the total as well. My final numbers also suggest just 36 points in this game. These two played here last year, a Pittsburgh victory, but only totaled 27 points in that game. **TAMPA BAY 24 PITTSBURGH 10**

BEST BETS

YTD 48-38 +17.20%

4% JACKSONVILLE +3

3% MINNESOTA +3

3% ARIZONA +4

3% DALLAS +6.5
3% BUFFALO/GREEN BAY OVER 43
3% CINCINNATI +7
3% HOUSTON/WASHINGTON UNDER 37
3% OAKLAND -3.5
3% TAMPA BAY -4
3% PITTSBURGH/TAMPA BAY UNDER 40

WEEK 17

The picks continued to grind out a profit last week, going 6-4 +3.70%, and are now 30-15 +39.40% over the past five weeks.

Typically, the last week of the season can be very dangerous, with some teams out of the playoffs and their motivation not known. This year, parity does us a favor, giving us at least 12 and maybe 13 games out of 16 games where teams are still playing for a playoff spot.

Teams that are out of the playoffs, playing teams that need to win to get into the playoffs are a solid betting proposition. I haven't done the study personally but someone I greatly respect has and they have calculated this number to be around 67% success for the teams out of the playoffs. That sample was close to 100 games so it is pretty significant. Past history has proven that this isn't a good enough reason to bet on such a team. As a matter of fact, it might actually be a pretty good reason to play against such a team.

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Yards Per Play (YPPL) 5.2

Philadelphia -1.5 NY GIANTS 37.5

The Giants have won three games in a row and low and behold, along with another Saints collapse, they are in the playoffs with a win here or a New Orleans loss. The win won't be easy as Philadelphia is fighting for home field advantage throughout the playoffs. Since Donovan McNabb went down, Philadelphia has rattled off five wins in a row. I'm not about to suggest what they have done is easy and they did go to SF and beat the 49ers on a Monday night in their first game without McNabb. But the other wins were against the Rams (with Kurt Warner), Seattle, Washington and Dallas. The Giants wins also came against Dallas and Washington but they also tossed in an outstanding performance last week at Indianapolis. The Giants out gained Indy 469 yards to 399 and, more importantly, 7.2 yppl to 6.0 yppl. Although Philadelphia has gone 5-0 SU and ATS since McNabb went out, the numbers speak a little differently. When McNabb went out, the Eagles were gaining 5.1 ypr and allowing 3.9 ypr. Since his departure, the Eagles are now averaging 3.6 ypr and allowing a whopping 4.7 ypr. While Philadelphia does qualify in this game in a fundamental rushing situation which is 485-376-34, they only qualify in one of the better subsets and none of the best subsets that I use to make it a play. And most of those stats were accumulated when McNabb was playing. He gained well over 100 yards rushing in their first meeting but without McNabb, the job of defending the Eagles gets much, much easier, as you can see from the stats. The Eagles also qualify in a negative letdown situation that is now 23-61-4 and just 1-4 this year. The Giants also qualify in a last home game situation which is 64-32-5 and was 3-2-1 last week. They are also a turnover table play, which is having a great season this year, going 66-48-2 and they qualify in a subset that is 134-74-4. My numbers make this game Philly by 1.5 points so the line is fair. The Philly defense has been outstanding all season, allowing just 4.6 yppl against 5.0 yppl and their offense has been solid, gaining 5.3 yppl against 5.1 yppl. For the Giants, their defense has held it's own, allowing just 5.1 yppl against 5.1 yppl but their strength has been the pass defense, allowing just 5.4 yps against 5.7 yps. On offense, they are gaining 5.4 yppl against 5.2 yppl and their passing offense is gaining a whopping 6.9 yps against 5.9 yps. This should be a good match up because Philly has thrown the ball better and defended the pass better since McNabb went out while they are not running the ball as well nor defending the run as well. The Giants don't defend the run as well or run the ball as well but, where Philly used to have an advantage, they don't anymore because of the McNabb injury. This series also used to be one sided but Philly has won the last three games, including winning 10-9 here last year. So, since McNabb has kind of come into his own, they have been able to beat the Giants. That's not the case here today. Before McNabb came into his own, the Giants had dominated this series here in New Jersey, winning five straight and losing just one of the past nine games here by more than three points. The situations are clearly in favor of the Giants. Without McNabb, the Eagles might get exposed a little today. I like the Giants to get the win. **NY GIANTS 26 PHILADELPHIA 17**

OAKLAND -7.5 Kansas City 48.5

Another team that needs to win to get to the playoffs but KC also needs Denver to lose this week and that is not likely to happen. For Oakland, much like Philadelphia, a win and they have home field advantage throughout the playoffs. KC has stayed within this number today in five of the past seven games played against the Raiders since they moved back to Oakland. This game has also seen a minimum of at least 52 points scored in every game but one since that time. My final numbers also predict about 59 points being score BUT, I ask you to use caution here because I have a very good 329-242-18 under system that is 30-20 this year (4-1 LW) that plays on the under in this game. I sure can't play the under with that history or the final points predicted but I can't play the over with that kind of situation on this game. That same situation applied to the under of the NO/CIN game last week and my final numbers predicted 64 points so the situation probably takes precedent over the numbers. Add in numerous KC injuries, including Priest Holmes out for this game and it makes it tough to take either the side or the total. I don't have any situations on either side in this game and my final numbers predict Oakland by only 2.5 points but they don't take into consideration the KC injuries. Oakland just looks real solid right now and they are gaining 5.9 ypppl against 5.3 ypppl while allowing just 5.1 ypppl against 5.4 ypppl. For KC, they are gaining 6.4 ypppl against 5.3 ypppl and are allowing 5.9 ypppl against 5.3 ypppl. I'll go against past history and side with the team with the MUCH better defense who has almost as good an offense, and maybe even a better offense, considering all the injuries.

OAKLAND 31 KANSAS CITY 21

Miami -1 NEW ENGLAND 37.5

I mentioned how bad I thought NE was last week and nothing I saw last week changes my mind here. As good as Belichick coached last year, he has screwed up the chemistry on this team this year. As a team, you want to have some character doing something with the ball. Last year, NE ran the ball very well. This year their offense is pathetic. They are averaging just 3.7 ypr against 4.2 ypr and 5.8 yps against 6.0 yps for a total of 5.0 ypppl against 5.3 ypppl, making their offense well below average. On defense, their pass defense has performed well, allowing just 5.7 yps against 6.2 yps but their run defense has suffered, allowing 4.5 ypr against 4.4 ypr. On defense overall, they are allowing 5.2 ypppl against 5.4 ypppl. The Miami offense is still playing pretty well, gaining 5.3 ypppl against 5.3 ypppl but remember many of those games were without Jay Fiedler. They also run the ball for 4.6 ypr against 4.3 ypr and that should suit them just fine against the Patriots rush defense. On defense, the strength is the pass defense, allowing just 5.6 yps against 6.1 yps and overall, allowing just 4.8 ypppl against 5.3 ypppl for the second ranked defense in the league, according to my ratings. I don't see NE doing much against this defense today and even though it's on the road where the Dolphins defense has struggled more and in the cold, they have the running game to get by in this game. Miami qualifies in a 485-376-34 fundamental rushing situation including many of the subsets and one that is 256-154-16. Miami is also a turnover table play, 66-48-2 this year, but they don't qualify in any of the better subsets. My final numbers in this game make NE a 1.5 point favorite so there is some value with NE but the situation favors Miami in this game. From a statistical standpoint, this game looks to play under but my final numbers suggest 39 points so no value on the under either. NE has now lost seven straight games to teams over .500 and I don't see anything different here. Miami has lost four straight on the road and five out of six although two of those losses were without Fiedler. The running game and a team they can match up with pretty well, give them the advantage here. NE needed to show up last week and when all was said and done, they had been out gained 393 yards to 216 yards and 6.0 ypppl to just 3.5 ypppl. That's not a playoff team effort and I don't think you'll see one this week either. **MIAMI 21 NEW ENGLAND 18**

WASHINGTON -6.5 Dallas 36

I'm watching the Dallas game last week, thinking what it must be like to be Dave Campo. You know your boss (Jerry Jones) has met with Bill Parcells during the week and you're about to lose your job after the final game of the season. You're getting killed on national television, not using Emmitt Smith like you should, he's upset and barking at you to play more. Now, you have to go into the locker room and give a speech after the game to get your team fired up for the final game. I don't think so. The Cowboys do have one thing going for them. They are playing Washington and they hate the Redskins so they might show up this week. They have now beat the Redskins in 10 straight games, at Dallas and at Washington. The Dallas offense is anemic, as they average just 4.7 ypppl against 5.1 ypppl. They do run the ball decent, gaining 4.3 ypr against 4.2 ypr and they'll face a Redskin defense that is allowing 4.1 ypr against 4.1 ypr, so just average against the rush. The Cowboys did run for 5.9 ypr in their first meeting this year. The Redskins defense, overall, allows just 4.8 ypppl against 5.1 ypppl. The Cowboys defense is playing

well, allowing just 4.9 yppf against 5.1 yppf and the Redskins offense is below average, gaining just 4.9 yppf against 5.1 yppf. Washington looked very good last week against a decent Houston defense, gaining 437 yards at 5.6 yppf and rushing the ball for 247 yards at 5.4 ypr. Dallas does qualify in a contrary situation that is 285-205-11 and 14-12 this year and a similar situation that is 163-105-5 and 7-4 this year. This game also qualifies as an under play, from a statistical standpoint and my final numbers suggest about 36 points being scored. But this series has been pretty high scoring in Washington, with six of the past ten going over the total. My final numbers also suggest this line should be closer to around 3.5 points. I can't take a team that may have quit on the year but I will lean with a good defensive team, getting points, who has dominated this series over the past five years or so. A lean towards the under as well. **WASHINGTON 17 DALLAS 16**

BUFFALO -7 Cincinnati 44.5

The Bills offense has slowed the past couple of weeks, gaining just 185 yards at 2.8 yppf last week and just 256 at 4.3 yppf the week before against SD. Their defense has also played much better, allowing just 223 yards at 3.4 yppf last week and just 292 yards at 4.3 yppf against SD. The weather has probably played a pretty big role in those two games, both offensively and defensively. This week, my numbers suggest a pretty high scoring game with Cincinnati, suggesting about 53 points but the weather could be a factor again this week and will keep me off of the total. For the year, Buffalo is averaging 5.4 yppf against 5.3 yppf and their defense is playing pretty well, allowing just 5.1 yppf against 5.2 yppf. For Cincinnati, they have been moving the ball pretty well, especially last week, where they gained 423 yards at 5.2 yppf and only allowed 210 yards at 3.4 yppf to New Orleans. For the year, Cincinnati is averaging just 4.9 yppf against 5.0 yppf and they are allowing 5.5 yppf against 5.0 yppf. Before Kitna had come in, Cincy hadn't averaged more than 4.3 yppf in any of their games and they were gaining just 3.5 yppf and allowing 5.4 yppf. Actually Kitna did play in one of those games but since he became the full time starter, the Bengal's have averaged 5.4 yppf and allowed 5.5 yppf. So, their defense has continued to play below average but their offense has really picked it up. And since he became the full time starter, they have averaged less than 4.9 yppf in only two of the eleven games. Throw out the win over Houston on the road and Cincinnati hasn't come closer than seven points in any of their road games. I have no situations on either team but I will lean with Buffalo and the over. **BUFFALO 31 CINCINNATI 22**

Atlanta -2.5 CLEVELAND 40.5

Big game for both teams here. The playoff implications, especially in the AFC, are too numerous to mention but Cleveland stands a pretty good chance of getting in if they can win this game. For Atlanta, win and they are in. If Atlanta losses and both the Giants and New Orleans win, they are out. If the Giants lose on Saturday, Atlanta is in. So, Atlanta could be in the playoffs before they play the game. This line could move because of that, so it is probably best to play this game early because the line will move against Cleveland and I am on them here. I haven't talked much about Cleveland this year simply because the situations haven't put me on them very often. Their offense is about average, gaining 5.1 yppf against 5.1 yppf and their defense is below average, allowing 5.3 yppf against 5.1 yppf. The weakness of their defense is the rush defense, allowing 4.4 ypr against 4.0 ypr and Atlanta has run the ball pretty well this year, gaining 4.6 ypr against 4.2 ypr. For the season, the Atlanta offense is gaining 5.4 yppf against 5.1 yppf but their defense has been below average, allowing 5.3 yppf against 5.0 yppf, including a very sub par rush defense that is allowing 4.6 ypr against 4.0 ypr. Teams with below average defenses shouldn't be laying points on the road against decent teams and Cleveland, while not great, is decent. And they qualify in some solid situations this week including a couple of momentum situations that are 75-42-2 and 151-103-10. In addition, Atlanta qualifies in a negative letdown situation that is 112-167-9. Cleveland also qualifies in a last home game situation that is 64-32-5 and they are a turnover table play, which is 66-48-2 this year and they qualify in a subset that is 134-74-4. My final numbers make this line a pick 'em so we get a little value as well. **CLEVELAND 25 ATLANTA 18**

Minnesota -3.5 DETROIT 47.5

I've praised Minnesota just about every week this year and you would probably have to go all the way back to the Tampa Bay game to find a time when I went against Minnesota, either with a play or a lean. I have liked the way they are getting things done all year, by stopping the run and running the ball. That formula gets you covers in this league. Unfortunately for the Vikings, they have turned the ball over numerous times, which has hurt their cause.

The league's worse defense hasn't helped them either. For Detroit, well, they have had their moments but most of the season has been just like last week, where they were out gained 533 yards to 208 yards and 6.7 ypl to 3.6 ypl. But, at home, they have been a little better including just two weeks ago when they just about upset TB. They have played seven games at home and lost only three of those by more than three points and only one of those by more than eight points. Meanwhile, for Minnesota, they won in their last game on the road, at New Orleans by one point, breaking a long road losing streak of 17 or 18 straight games. It's hard to imagine a team who had lost consecutive games on the road in the double digits, who finally just won a game by only one point, with the league's worse defense, allowing 6.0 ypl against 5.1 ypl, to be laying more than a field goal on the road. And no matter how bad you think Detroit is and how well Minnesota might be playing, also remember Minnesota came here last year after having upset Tennessee at home to play an 0-12 Detroit team and lost that game 24-27, laying three points. The Minnesota offense has been terrific this year, gaining 5.7 ypl against 5.1 ypl, including rushing the ball for 5.4 ypr against 4.4 ypr. They will face a Detroit defense that is below average, allowing 5.4 ypl against 5.1 ypl but has been decent against the rush, allowing 3.9 ypr against 4.2 ypr. The Detroit offense has been bad, gaining just 4.6 ypl against 5.1 ypl, but at home they are gaining 4.9 ypl and they are allowing just 5.0 ypl so they have played much better at home. Other than a seven point loss two years ago and a 21 point loss four years ago, Detroit has won or stayed within two points of the other five games. The Lions also qualify in some great situations this week as well. They qualify in a contrary situation that is 60-33-2 and they also qualify in a fundamental rushing situation that is 108-39-7 since 1983. Minnesota is a turnover table play but they don't qualify in any of the better subsets. I also like the over in this game. My final numbers predict a total of 53 points, giving us some value on the over. The game will be played inside, so weather won't be a factor. From a statistical standpoint, this game also qualifies as an over play. Since 1994, every game has ended with at least 46 points scored and nine of the past ten years have seen the total finish with at least 46 points scored. So plenty of points are scored in this contest. **DETROIT 33 MINNESOTA 27**

Tennessee -8.5 HOUSTON 36

Nothing seems to be getting in Tennessee's way right now. They ran right over Jacksonville last week, gaining 175 yards on the ground, averaging 4.4 ypr and averaged 4.8 ypl while allowing Jacksonville just 3.7 ypl. The situations greatly, greatly favored Jacksonville last week and Tennessee over came all of them in the easy win. This week, the situations greatly favor Houston. I am a little worried with playing Houston because they had some real problems stopping the Washington rush last week, allowing 247 yards at 5.4 ypr. The Tennessee numbers are starting to look pretty good, averaging 5.1 ypl against 5.0 ypl while allowing 5.2 ypl against 5.1 ypl. They'll face a Houston defense that is now allowing 5.0 ypl against 5.1 ypl, which is still above average. But the Houston offense is still pathetic, gaining just 3.8 ypl against 5.1 ypl. Houston does play the pass pretty well, allowing just 5.7 yps against 5.9 yps and that is the one area that Tennessee has done well in all year, gaining 6.4 yps against 5.7 yps. But Tennessee is starting to run the ball, gaining 175 yards last week and 238 yards the week before against New England. Houston does qualify in a nice bounce back situation that is 59-26-2 (2-0 TY) and a contrary situation that is 111-60-4. They are also a turnover table play, which is 66-48-2 this year and qualify in a subset of that which is 122-62-4. My numbers make Tennessee only a .5 point favorite, giving us plenty of value on Houston. One good reason Houston probably won't lay down here is they are now taking on the former Houston Oilers and their first return back to Houston since Bud Adams packed things up and left town. The situations and the value favor Houston. **TENNESSEE 24 HOUSTON 21**

NEW ORLEANS -7 Carolina 44

Last year, NO lost their final four games by a combined score of 52-160. They're not losing their games that badly on the scoreboard this year, probably because they are a better team, but it looks like the same things are happening again. The last two weeks, they have lost as seven point plus favorites, and have been out gained 509-862 against Minnesota and Cincinnati. Those are not the numbers of a playoff team, and if they don't get help this week, they won't make the playoffs. The Saints defense is terrible, allowing 5.5 ypl against 5.0 ypl and they have now allowed at least 20 points in every game this year and 26 of their last 28 games. Let's put things in perspective. Their defense is just as bad as the Cincinnati defense. Although the numbers are distributed differently, they are equally bad as a whole. Actually, at least Cincinnati stops the rush, while NO can't stop either the rush or the pass. The NO offense is still solid, although Aaron Brooks might be more hurt than we know, based on the results from the past couple of weeks. They are averaging 5.3 ypl against 5.1 ypl. They'll face a good Carolina defense that is allow-

ing just 4.6 ypl against 5.0 ypl but their offense leaves something to be desired, gaining just 4.5 ypl against 5.1 ypl. Carolina does qualify in a negative letdown situation that is 112-169-9 but my final numbers suggest only a six point win for NO. It's hard to lay points with such a bad defense and I have to lean with Carolina in this game. Carolina is a turnover table play, which is 66-48-2 this year, but they don't qualify in any of the better subsets. **NEW ORLEANS 24 CAROLINA 21**

PITTSBURGH -7.5 Baltimore 38

Baltimore has about as much a shot of making the playoffs as I had of winning the \$315 lottery last week. And I didn't even play the lottery, so I guess they have a little better chance. For Pittsburgh, well, if Oakland (playing on Saturday) loses and Tennessee loses and they win, they get home field throughout the playoffs. If just one of those teams lose and Pittsburgh wins, they will be the second seed and get a bye. Plenty of motivation for Pittsburgh here. Pittsburgh has lost three straight at home to Baltimore but when the Steelers have been favored by 3.5 or more against Baltimore/Cleveland, they have won and covered seven straight games at home. In other words, when they were the better team and supposed to take care of business, they have. The Steelers defense (and they have shown this in years past and let us down come playoff time) has really picked it up. They have allowed the following yards and yards per play in their last four games: TB (277, 4.3), CAR (131, 2.3), HOU (47, 1.2) and JACK (226, 4.8). Hard to believe the below average Baltimore offense, gaining just 4.7 ypl against 5.1 ypl will do much more than these past four teams. The Steelers defense, for the year, is now allowing just 4.7 ypl against 5.0 ypl. Their offense continues to move the ball, gaining 5.5 ypl against 5.1 ypl and they are throwing the ball very well, gaining 6.6 yps against 5.9 yps and will face an average Baltimore pass defense that is allowing 5.9 yps against 5.9 yps. The Steelers passed the ball for 9.0 yps against the league's best pass defense, in TB, on Monday night. I just don't see much of a chance for Baltimore in this one. My numbers only favor Pittsburgh by 1.5 points in this game but I like the match up's for Pittsburgh in this game. Baltimore does qualify in a contrary situation which is 285-205-11 but I'll buck those odds and go with Pittsburgh. **PITTSBURGH 27 BALTIMORE 16**

INDIANAPOLIS (NL) Jacksonville

Hard to make a call on this game without the status of Mark Brunell known or the line. The situations and value greatly favor Jacksonville in this game. They qualify in a contrary situation that is 285-205-11 and they also qualify in a fundamental rushing situation which is 485-376-34. Indianapolis, based on their poor defense last week, qualifies in a negative 41-81-6 situation. Indianapolis is a turnover table play but they don't qualify in any of the better subsets. My numbers make this line only 1.5 points for Indy so there is plenty of value for Jacksonville. I can't recommend Jacksonville here without knowing who the quarterback is but I will lean their way. Take away the Houston and Dallas wins this year for Indy (three wins) and they haven't won any games by more than seven points other than their abnormal win over Philadelphia. For Jacksonville, throw out their two losses to Tennessee this year and they haven't lost by more than seven points to anybody this year. If this line comes out at seven or more, I may take a look at Jacksonville, if I know Brunell is starting. **INDIANAPOLIS 22 JACKSONVILLE 21**

NY JETS -1.5 Green Bay 40.5

Well, the situations are just right for GB this week. TB lost last week, giving GB the second seed if they win and Philadelphia losses on Saturday, which is very likely, GB could claim the number one spot if they win this game. But, unfortunately, the situations don't favor them this week. I hope I am wrong but I haven't been wrong yet this year when playing on or against the Packers in a best bet (3-0). The match ups are better as they defend the pass very well against a Jets team who passes the ball very well. The Jets, as a whole, average 5.5 ypl against 5.3 ypl and they throw the ball for 6.6 yps against 6.1 yps. Green Bay, meanwhile, allows just 5.0 ypl against 5.0 ypl and only allows 5.1 yps against 5.6 yps. Their defensive numbers, while always good against the pass, have gotten better the last couple of weeks because of poor weather conditions which have hurt the offenses, including their offense, and helped the defenses. But the Packers are also getting healthier on defense, witness Vonnie Holiday, who had five sacks and caused three fumbles last week. And Gilbert Brown is back. The Packers have struggled defending the run, allowing 4.9 ypr against 4.3 ypr but the Jets only average 4.0 ypr against 4.2 ypr.. On offense, for GB, the weather has hampered their numbers but they are still averaging 5.3 ypl against 5.2 ypl while the Jets are allowing 5.5 ypl against 5.3 ypl. So, the match up's aren't bad for GB but the situations are in the Jets favor. The Jets qualify in a home momentum situation that is 104-60-1 (8-2 TY) and a subset of that which is 66-

21-6 (7-2 TY). The Packers also qualify in a letdown situation that is 9-31-3 (1-3 TY). The Jets are also a turnover table play, which is 66-48-2 this year and they qualify in a subset which is 134-74-4. They also qualify in a last home game situation which is 64-32-5 and GB qualifies in another letdown situation that is 112-167-9. My numbers make this line two points so the line is fair and the situations are in the Jets favor. I hope I'm wrong on this one but the situations force me to play the Jets in this game. **NY JETS 24 GREEN BAY 14**

DENVER -11 Arizona 42.5

A lot of situations that favor Denver to get into the playoffs if they win this game, which they should, despite how bad they are playing. Arizona does qualify in a contrary situation that is 285-205-11 and my numbers make this line only 4.5 points, giving us solid value on Arizona. But the Arizona numbers are terrible this year, with their drop off the past couple of weeks, and despite covering last week against SF, they were out gained 358 yards to 184 yards and 4.9 yppl to 3.3 yppl. Denver lost bad at Oakland last week, really never in the game, but their final numbers weren't that bad, gaining 324 yards to 322 yards and 4.8 yppl to 4.7 yppl. I'll lean with Arizona, remembering teams out of playoff contention, playing teams who need to win to get in, are profitable situations. I also have a 41-15 situation on the over in this game but I don't see enough value to play the over and weather could be a factor. **DENVER 27 ARIZONA 17**

SAN DIEGO -3 Seattle 43

SD has really struggled the past couple of weeks, much like last year, when they lost their last nine games of they year, including their final game to Seattle, at home, 22-25 as two point favorites. This year they have lost three in a row and four out of five games. By the time they start their game, they may be out of the playoff race. The match up is pretty favorable for them here as SD gains 4.6 ypr against 4.2 ypr and Seattle allows 4.9 ypr against 4.5 ypr. But, Seattle hasn't allowed more than 4.3 ypr in any of their past four games. SD, meanwhile, rushed for 5.7 ypr last week and 5.8 ypr four weeks ago against Denver but other than those two outbursts, they haven't rushed for more than 4.3 ypr in any of their past seven games, so the running game has been stuck in neutral. Without the running game, they have trouble winning. It should be noted they did play some pretty good teams during that stretch, so maybe this will suit them better. The situations do favor SD, as they qualify in a bounce back situation that is 30-8-1 and Seattle qualifies in a negative letdown situation that is 112-167-9. SD also qualifies in a fundamental rushing situation which is 485-376-34. My numbers make this line two points so we lose a little value in this game with SD. It's too hard for me to play SD in this game, knowing they could be out of the playoff race by the time they start this game, the value doesn't side with them and Seattle seems to be the loser, more free willing team right now. I will lean with SD but that is it. I also liked the over but my final numbers indicate only about 41 points being scored so no value there either. **SAN DIEGO 24 SEATTLE 19**

Tampa Bay -7 CHICAGO 32

Another game too tough to call right now with all the question marks. Brad Johnson is not likely to start in this game, which leaves Rob Johnson as the starting quarterback. If that is the case, I greatly favor the Bears. Rob Johnson, as you saw on Monday night and saw in the Green Bay game, takes way too many sacks and he will be lunch meat for the Bears in this game. We all know TB hasn't won a game when the temperature has been below whatever degrees they use to get their perfect numbers. I don't put too much weight in that but I do think it means something. If GB wins, there might not be too much motivation for the Bucs to go to a cold weather site to win a game in a spot they have never played well before. The Bucs have lost two straight and eight out of ten here in Illinois. Six of the past eight games have also totaled less than 32 points scored. This game qualifies as a statistical under play. TB, despite being badly out played last week, 4.3 yppl to 5.4 yppl, still brings a great defense, allowing just 4.2 yppl against 5.2 yppl. Their offense is still below average, gaining just 4.9 yppl against 5.2 yppl and they'll face an average Bears defense that is allowing 5.2 yppl against 5.2 yppl. But the Bears offense is terrible, gaining just 4.6 yppl against 5.2 yppl and their quarterback is a question mark as I write this but if it's Henry Burris, I don't see the Bears scoring much either. This could be a 0-0 game. My numbers only make TB a .5 point favorite so there is plenty of value on the Bears. They qualify as a turnover table play, which is 66-48-2 this year and a subset which is 122-62-4. I like the Bears and the under but the total will probably be around 32 points, which is a little too low to play under but it will probably still get there. **CHICAGO 13 TAMPA BAY 10**

San Francisco -2 ST LOUIS 41.5

Hard to recommend any sides or totals on this game with the St. Louis quarterback situation up in the air. Warner, Bulger are out and Martin may not start, leaving the job to a fourth string quarterback. For SF, I believe they are still alive, if TB loses on Sunday night, for the third spot in the NFC. So, a TB loss may give them motivation. But a TB win, and you may not see Garcia or Owens or any of the starting backs. You may not see Owens anyway. Anyway you slice it, I lean with the Rams who qualify in a last home game situation which is 64-32-5 situation, qualify as a turnover table play, which is 66-48-2 this year and a subset of that which is 122-62-4 and a fundamental rushing situation which is 108-39-7. My numbers also favor the Rams by .5 point, so if we get the line I think this will be, there would be value on the Rams. For now, I just have to lean their way with too many question marks. **ST LOUIS 24 SAN FRANCISCO 19**

BEST BETS

YTD 54-42 +20.90%

3% NY GIANTS +2

3% CLEVELAND +2

3% DETROIT +3.5

3% MINN/DETROIT OVER 47.5

3% HOUSTON +8.5

3% NY JETS -2

NFL WILD CARD ROUND

I continued my hot run last week, going 5-1 +11.70%. That now makes the run for the past six weeks 35-16 +51.10%. For the season, I am now 59-43 57.38% and +32.60%. The playoffs have traditionally been very good to me and hopefully that will continue this year.

Although this is a very exciting time of the season with every snap extremely important to the players, it is just another handful of betting opportunities for us, the bettor. I have played over 100 games this year and these next 10-15 plays should not be played any differently than the first 100 plays. These games mean a lot more to the players playing the games than they do to us, betting the games. It's life and death to them, just another betting opportunity to us. Please keep that in mind during the playoffs.

One additional note regarding the Wild Card round of the playoffs. Since 1983, there have been 62 games played during the Wild Card round. In 55 (91.70%) of those 60 games, the team winning the game also covered the spread. There were also two pushes against the spread. So pick the winner of the game straight up and you have the winner of the game against the spread, in all likely hood. That is much easier said than done, but if you have the winner, you probably have the spread winner too.

Home team in caps. All records against the spread unless otherwise noted.

League averages for comparison to the stats that will be listed below.

Yards Per Rush (YPR) 4.2
Yards Per Pass (YPS) 5.9
Yards Per Play (YPPL) 5.2

NY JETS -6 Indianapolis 41.5

Jets come in here flying sky high, having blown out GB last week 42-17. I was on the Jets in that game because they qualified in a number of outstanding situations. This week, however; the tables have turned and it is the Colts, not the Jets, who qualify in the great situations. Both teams are throwing the ball extremely well as the Colts average 6.6 yps against 5.7 yps and the Jets average 6.6 yps against 6.0 yps. And both teams defense the pass equally as poor with the Colts allowing 5.8 yps against 5.7 yps and the Jets allowing 6.0 yps against 5.9 yps. Neither team runs the ball particularly well. The Colts are averaging just 3.6 ypr against 4.1 ypr and the Jets are averaging 4.0 ypr against 4.3 ypr. As well as the Jets played last week, they still only gained 4.4 ypr against GB. Normally that is pretty good but against the Packers, they probably should have averaged around 4.5, which means they continue to be below average running the ball and probably won't be able to take full advantage of the Colts poor rushing defense. The Colts are allowing 4.3 ypr against 4.1 ypr and the Jets are allowing 4.6 ypr against 4.4 ypr. So both teams are equally as bad defending the rush but also equally bad rushing the ball. These two teams are very similar in style. One may point to the red not Jets as the team to play in this game against a Colts team who has failed to cover their last two games and three of their past four games. But, in actuality, that's a good thing. It will only serve the Colts to make sure they are fully focused, while the Jets will probably still be thinking about last week's terrific win. And the numbers bear that out too. Teams who have lost consecutive games against the spread are now 29-7-1 when laying eight or less points (or a dog) and if their opponent is just an average team (12 or less wins), they are now 29-5-1 against the spread. That's a clear sign these teams come prepared to play in these games. Indy has also been an underachiever against the spread this year, going just 6-10 but they qualify in a 20-8 situation based on that. The Jets are coming off of their 25 point victory over the Packers but they might be in for a little letdown here as teams in the WC round that are coming off a 20 point victory or more and were favored by less than 10 points in that victory, are now 0-13-1 against the spread. So, we have a team who played what was supposed to be a competitive game last week and blew out that team, now playing with a little over confidence in their next game or at least the line maker has made the line over confident. The Jets have only been favored by six points or more once this year and that was a straight up loss at Chicago, 13-19. Meanwhile, the Colts have only been underdogs of six or more twice this year and they beat solid teams straight up in Philadelphia and Denver. Indy rates as my sixth highest offensive team and the Jets have simply not faced too many good offenses this year. They have allowed 29 points to Kansas City, seven points to Minnesota and 13 points to Denver and 26 points to Oakland. Those are the only good offenses they have faced this year. The Colts offense has scored at least 21 points in all eight road games this year except two games and it is very likely they will get to around 21 points

again today. If they get to 21 points, I think it will be very tough for the Jets to cover this number. NY is now just 25-58-5 as a home favorite since 1983, including 15-33-2 when laying four or more points. Tony Dungy teams are now 14-5-1 when getting four or more points. My final numbers predict about a four to five point Jets victory, giving us added value with Indy as well. I thought this game might be high scoring but I do have a 16-2 totals system for the playoffs that suggests this game could be lower scoring than "they" think. INDIANAPOLIS 23 NY JETS 21

GREEN BAY -6.5 Atlanta 40

Boy did the Packers blow an opportunity last week. They went from the number one seed to the number three seed and will have to spend the rest of the playoffs on the road, if they are so lucky. For Atlanta, well, they sort of backed into the playoffs with their loss last week after New Orleans also lost. This is a rematch of week one, when GB got lucky to win a 37-34 overtime battle with Atlanta. This game pits the league's two worst rush defenses against each other. GB allows 4.8 ypr against 4.3 ypr and Atlanta allows 4.6 ypr against 4.0 ypr. I think GB stands the better chance of exploiting the Falcons rush defense. GB averages 4.3 ypr against 4.2 ypr. Atlanta averages 4.6 ypr against 4.2 ypr but if you take out Vick's rushing numbers, they are only averaging 3.9 ypr against 4.2 ypr, making them a below average rushing offense. Yes, Vick has to be accounted for, but I think the truer numbers are without Vick's numbers because he won't be looking to run on every play. And with the weather a little colder, his running game might be slowed down as well. The Packers defense is the better defense, allowing 5.1 yppf against 5.1 yppf while Atlanta allows 5.3 yppf against 5.1 yppf. GB only allows 5.2 yps against 5.7 yps and they will make it a little tougher for Atlanta to move the ball, considering the Falcons really can't run the ball. Atlanta does average 6.1 yps against 5.8 yps so they should have some success moving the ball. But this game will come down to the team who runs the ball better and that team is GB. Atlanta has allowed at least 24 points in every game on the road this year except a 10 point effort at the Giants (before Fassel started calling the plays) and a shut out of Carolina, who has the league's second worst offense. GB, on the other hand, has scored at least 24 points in every game this year at home except a 14 point effort against a good Carolina defense and a 10 point effort against Buffalo, where the winds were nearly impossible to throw into. The Packers loss last week actually serves them very well in this game, as they qualify in a 21-4-1 bounce back situation based on that loss. GB also qualifies in a 39-15-0 playoff situation. Everyone knows how well GB plays at home in the playoffs, having never lost. I think that stat is a little over rated but the following numbers are not over rated. GB is now 24-9 at home when facing greater than .500 teams, during the Favre era. If they are laying less than seven points, they are 18-4 in that situation. Also, if GB is coming off a loss, they are 11-0 when facing a greater than .500 team. And, as the season gets later, GB is now 14-0 when favored by less than seven points versus a greater than .500 team from week number nine on. My final numbers indicate anywhere from 47 to 52 points being scored in this game. Atlanta has scored 30 or more on the road in five of their eight games this year. GB hasn't allowed more than 22 points at home since that 34 point outburst by the Falcons back in week one, but they also haven't faced many good offenses at home this year. Other than Atlanta, they really only faced one other good offensive team at home. They have played Carolina (31st offense), Chicago (30th), Detroit (28th), Washington (24th), Buffalo (17th) and Miami (16th). Miami was without Jay Fiedler and the Buffalo game was played in high winds. The other game was against Minnesota (2nd) and they allowed 22 points. The Packers will get their points and they should allow a decent number of points. With a total of only 40 points, I think this game has a very good shot of going over the total. My numbers only predict GB to win by three to six points but the situations greatly favor them here and I will side with them and the over. GREEN BAY 31 ATLANTA 20

PITTSBURGH -7.5 Cleveland 42.5

I am passing on this game because I have great situations going both ways but this should be a very entertaining game to watch. Cleveland just seems to be in every game right down to the wire this year and you can just about guarantee they will have a chance to win this game again this week in the final minutes. That's just the way their season has gone. They are now 11-5 against the spread this year while Pittsburgh has blown many opportunities to get into the end zone and consequently, they are just 5-10-1 against the spread. Both these teams like to pass the ball and are doing it pretty well, which should give us a high scoring game. I couldn't find enough reasons to play the over in this game but I think it has a good shot to go over the total. Cleveland doesn't run the ball quite well enough for me to have enough confidence for them to consistently move the ball and score. Pittsburgh is averaging 6.5 yps against 5.8 yps and as a whole on offense they are averaging 5.4 yppf against 5.1 yppf. Cleveland is allow-

ing 6.0 yps against 5.9 yps and as a whole, they are allowing 5.2 yppl against 5.1 yppl. On offense, Cleveland is about average, gaining 5.1 yppl against 5.1 yppl and the Pittsburgh defense is allowing 4.9 yppl against 5.0 yppl. Cleveland has lost only one game by more than seven points this year and their point spread success this year is a positive as they qualify in a 42-17-1 playoff situation. But, Cleveland has won and covered their last two games and that puts them into a negative 10-29-1 situation. They have also put together back to back solid defensive efforts but that is actually a negative and they qualify in a negative 12-43-4 situation based on their solid defensive efforts. So, while the numbers and the logic say Cleveland can hang in here, there are some solid situations going against them here that will keep me off of this game. I look for Pittsburgh to win a close game. PITTSBURGH 27 CLEVELAND 21

SAN FRANCISCO -3 NY Giants 40

Nothing better than to see the Giants look unbelievably good last week in beating the Eagles, while the 49ers were going through the motions on Monday night and losing. That sets up a great situation this week for the public to pound the Giants. But, I believe the correct side is the other side, the 49ers. SF is coming off a loss but that actually sets them up in a very solid 21-4-1 playoff bounce back situation. They are also coming off of consecutive spread losses (actually eight straight losses against the spread) and that sets them up in a 29-5-1 situation as these teams seem to focus much more for their playoff game. In addition, the Giants are red hot, having covered four in a row but that actually sets them up in a negative 6-26-1 let down playoff situation. The situations are certainly in the 49ers favor and the match up is too. The Giants have trouble stopping the run and have allowed 4.5 ypr against 4.3 ypr this year and that poor rush defense plays right into the 49ers hands as they average 4.6 ypr against 4.3 ypr. The Giants offense has moved the ball extremely well this year, averaging 5.5 yppl against 5.1 yppl, including 6.9 yps against 5.8 yps. The 49ers defense is very average, allowing 5.3 yppl against 5.3 yppl. The total in this game is pretty low, but the 49ers love to run the ball and eat up the clock. Just watch the first quarter of the Monday night game last week when they ran 20 plays on the opening drive and scored, eating up just about the whole first quarter. My numbers make SF a 3.5 point favorite so we have a little value on the 49ers too. The Giants are playing very well right now but SF has been taking it pretty easy the past couple of weeks and they are getting some of their players back and a little healthier. The situations greatly favor SF and SF should be able to run the ball pretty successfully. If they can run the ball, which they should be able to do, they will also be able to throw the ball. I like the 49ers to win a close game here. SAN FRANCISCO 24 NY GIANTS 16

Be sure to check back next week as it looks like a 35-3-2 situation that has won the money a remarkable 31 STRAIGHT TIMES could be playing as many as three teams.

BEST BETS

YTD 59-43 +32.60%

3% INDIANAPOLIS +6

3% GREEN BAY -6.5 No higher than -7

3% ATLANTA/GB OVER 40 No higher than 41

3% SAN FRANCISCO -3

NFL DIVISIONAL ROUND

After having six consecutive winning weeks, where I amassed nearly 70% winners, I crashed and burned with the plays last week, turning in an 0-4 performance. Even with that miserable performance, the record still stands at nearly 56% (59-47) winners and just under a +20.0% (+19.40%) profit. I look to bounce back from last week's performance with a great effort this week.

It's no secret that home teams in the playoffs have performed better than road teams and home teams in this round have been very profitable as well, going 43-30-3 since 1983. If our team had a bye the week before and are playing a team that did not have a bye, the home team is 35-25-2. But there are situations where the home team off the bye does better, including a subset that is 27-15-1 in this round and an even better subset that is 17-6. So, without the 27-15-1 subset, teams are just 8-10-1 if they had a bye and without the second 17-6 subset, they are just 18-19. So before you decide to just blindly play the home teams in this round, make sure you know which teams perform well and which don't.

The situation I talked about last week, which had won 31 straight times, ended up not having a play this week.

Home team in caps. All records against the spread unless otherwise noted.

League averages for comparison to the stats that will be listed below.

Yards Per Rush (YPR) 4.2
Yards Per Pass (YPS) 5.9
Yards Per Play (YPPL) 5.2

TENNESSEE -4 Pittsburgh 43.5

The Steelers may have gotten a little lucky last week in their come from behind win over Cleveland, 36-33. And I've seen it written in many places this week that they gave up so many points last week and they won't be so lucky this week. First, let me tell you Tennessee does not qualify in the better 27-15-1 or 17-6 subsets. Also, let me tell you that teams that give up a lot of points in their previous games do very well in the playoffs, especially when playing against teams who have been pretty good in their previous games on defense. Pittsburgh qualifies in a 40-10-4 situation based on that premise. The Steelers are also coming off of consecutive spread losses and they fit a situation that is 29-7-1 playing on teams off of consecutive spread losses. Tennessee did beat Pittsburgh earlier this year 31-23 and I had Tennessee in that game. Tennessee is just 2-4 when favored by more than three points this year and those two spread wins came at Houston and at Cincinnati. Despite how bad those teams are, they nearly lost both of those games to the spread as well. Pittsburgh has been an underdog only twice this year. They came back and pushed against New Orleans, losing 29-32 and beat TB a few weeks ago, 17-14. These two teams are pretty similar in that neither runs the ball very well and both pass the ball very well. Pittsburgh averages 6.5 yps against 5.8 yps while Tennessee averages 6.4 yps against 5.7 yps. Pittsburgh, despite last week's fiasco, actually stops the pass a little better than Tennessee. They allow 5.5 yps against 5.8 yps while Tennessee is just average stopping the pass, allowing 5.7 yps against 5.7 yps. We all know how Pittsburgh has let us down in previous years as a big home favorite but this is the perfect role for them. They are getting points, and plenty of them to either win the game SU or just cover the spread in a close loss. I won't bore you with the numbers but Pittsburgh is actually slightly better on both sides of the ball. The situations are greatly in their favor and as I have said, despite Tennessee coming off a bye, they are not in any of the situations which have been so profitable over the years. My numbers favor Tennessee by only 2.5 points, giving us added value with Pittsburgh. I also like the over in this game. I liked the over last week as well but my numbers didn't quite support it but this week my numbers suggest about 50 points being scored in this game. I'll bite this week in a game played between two teams very similar to last week's game. PITTSBURGH 27 TENNESSEE 26

PHILADELPHIA -7.5 Atlanta 38.5

Many people will be on Philly this week. And possibly for good reasons too. After all, Philly does qualify in the 27-15-1 and 17-6 subsets, which are actually part of a playoff system that is now 39-16 since 1983. Philly is also coming off a loss in their last game and they qualify in a situation that is 21-6-1 based on that premise. Atlanta, despite winning easily last week against GB, 27-7, actually got a little lucky in that game. The Falcons had a +5

turnover ratio and I have never seen Brett Favre play with so little emotion as I saw in that game. I actually thought he was going to retire after the game. The Packers simply quit in that game. They also lost their top two receivers and their top running back during the game, along with playing without their top safety. So, the situation ended up greatly favoring the Falcons. And, for the game, Atlanta actually only gained 4.5 yppl to the Packers 4.6 yppl. The differences were the turnovers and Vick's ability to get out of holes and make the defense miss him. There's good reason to think he won't do that this week. The Philly defense is similar to the TB defense, which gave Vick so many problems in the two games he faced them. Also, the Atlanta defense is still a poor defense. They are actually my 32nd rated team defending the rush and McNabb and Staley should take advantage of that this week. The Philly defense is allowing just 4.7 yppl against 5.0 yppl, while the Atlanta defense is allowing 5.3 yppl against 5.1 yppl. On offense, Philly is averaging 5.2 yppl against 5.0 yppl while Atlanta is averaging 5.3 yppl against 5.1 yppl. Having said all of that, I can't take Philly this week. Atlanta qualifies in an outstanding 40-10-4 situation and they are 5-1 as a dog this year. Do you know what Andy Reid's record is at Philly when favored by more than four points against a better than .500 team? It's 0-0. He has been favored by more than four points plenty of times but never against a real good solid club. Throw in the question mark about how McNabb will play this week and this game becomes even more iffy. My final numbers make this line about 5.5 points so there is a little value on Atlanta. I think the best play in this game is the over. The number is 38.5 but my final numbers show about 48 points being scored in this game. I think the match ups favor Philly in this game and they favor Philly's offense to be able to do some damage. But, we all know Vick is usually good for a touchdown or two based simply on his talent. I think there should plenty of points scored here. I will favor Philly in this game because of the match ups but the situation on Atlanta is simply too great to ignore. I think the better play here is on the over with the total set well below (5.5 points) the average score in an NFL game this year. PHILADELPHIA 28 ATLANTA 20

TAMPA BAY -6 San Francisco 39

I said coming into the playoffs that I thought SF was probably the worse team out of all of the teams. And I thought they would be a terrific play against team in the playoffs. Unfortunately the situations have lined up on them instead of against them. I will tell you right off the bat that I think this game is a good game to pass on. TB qualifies in the same 39-16 situation that Philadelphia qualifies in but SF qualifies in the same 40-10-4 situation that Atlanta and Pittsburgh qualify in and they also qualify in the same 29-7-1 situation that Pittsburgh qualifies in. So, there are strong situations going both ways, which means this game is a good game to pass on. But, I'll try and give you even more reasons to pass on this game. The match up really favors TB in this game. The Bucs defense is allowing just 4.2 yppl against 5.1 yppl while the SF offense is just average, gaining 5.3 yppl against 5.3 yppl. While the TB offense is below average, gaining just 4.9 yppl against 5.2 yppl, they should be able to do some damage against an average SF defense that is allowing 5.3 yppl against 5.3 yppl. But neither of these teams have performed well in their respective roles in this game. SF is now just 13-26 on the road against better than .500 teams. That record goes all the way back to 1991 so it certainly encompasses the great 49er teams of the early '90's. That record is an even worse 7-24 if they are off a win. Simply put, the 49ers (even during their SB years) played most of their tough games at home. When they had to go on the road, whether it was during the regular season or the playoffs, they failed. During the playoffs, they failed at Dallas in 1993, at GB in 1996, at Atlanta in 1998, and at GB last year. They have simply been very bad on the road against good teams. But, TB isn't so hot themselves, when asked to lay a lot of points at home. Their horrible offense has always kept good teams in the game. TB is now 0-7 when laying five or more points against .500 or better teams at home since Tony Dungy took over. That record includes a loss this year with Jon Gruden at the helm as well and includes six of seven SU losses in that role. However; Gruden, in his days at Oakland, was actually 6-1 in that same role, winning all six games SU. He is 0-1 with TB this year. So, maybe that will change under Gruden. My numbers favor TB by five points and by nine points, suggesting even more reason to stay away from this game. Bottom line is the situations favor both teams. The recent history of both of these clubs in their respective roles doesn't favor either team and my final numbers suggest both teams are getting some value. My final total in this game is about 35 points, meaning the under might be a good play here. The match up favors TB and I will lean that way but I really suggest betting your money on other teams this weekend. TAMPA BAY 22 SAN FRANCISCO 13

OAKLAND -5.5 NY Jets 47.5

This ought to be a great game and these two teams have played plenty of times during the past two seasons. They met earlier this year in Oakland and the Raiders won that game 26-20 laying six points. They met at the end of last

year in Oakland and the Jets won that game, which put them into the playoffs and forced them to travel right back to Oakland the following week for the first round of the playoffs. Oakland won that game, rather easily 38-24. This Oakland team is really playing great ball right now. They are averaging 5.8 yppl against 5.3 yppl on offense and allowing only 5.0 yppl against 5.4 yppl on defense. I rank them as the third best offensive team in the league and their defense is now ranked as the fifth best defensive team in the league. For the Jets, well, the only team that has slowed them down since Chad Pennington took over is the Raiders. They did lose at Chicago in a letdown spot but this team is playing extremely well right now. Their numbers on the year are 5.5 yppl against 5.2 yppl on offense and 5.4 yppl against 5.3 yppl on defense. Those numbers are actually much better than that since Pennington took over. But this is a very rough spot for the Jets this week. Oakland qualifies in a 39-16 situation and a 43-17-1 situation which won with Cleveland last week while the Jets qualify in a letdown situation which is 7-29-1. The Raiders should be much healthier in the secondary for this game and that health should make the difference in this game. Oakland won here earlier in the year against the Jets and they beat the Jets in the first round of the playoffs last year when the Jets were in a bad situation. They are in a bad situation again this week and their fine run should come to an end. My final numbers make Oakland only a four point favorite so there is some value with the Jets but the situations are simply too strong to ignore Oakland as the play here. My final numbers also suggest just 43 or 44 points being scored here so I would lean towards the under. I won't take the under because both of these teams offenses are playing so well right now but that should be enough to keep you off of the over. OAKLAND 27 NY JETS 17

BEST BETS

YTD 59-47 +19.40%

3% PITTSBURGH +4

3% PITTSBURGH/TENNESSEE OVER 43.5

3% ATLANTA/PHILADELPHIA OVER 38.5

3% OAKLAND -5.5

NFL CONFERENCE CHAMPIONSHIP ROUND

A nice bounce back week last week, going 3-1 +5.70%. That made it seven winning weeks out of the last eight weeks, where I have compiled a record of 38-20 65.5%. The wins last week brought my season record to 62-48 56.4% +25.10%.

Before I get into the write ups this week, I wanted to mention some Conference Championship notes. Coming into this year, there have been 64 games played in the CC since 1970. When the line is less than 10 points, the team winning the game is a perfect 51-0-2 ats. Essentially, whoever wins the game straight up also wins the game against the spread.

If we can accept that points allowed are a good measure of the better defense, then it is helpful to know that the better defense (team allowing less points per game) is now 44-18-2 ats in the CC game. That would imply Tampa Bay and Oakland should get the cover this weekend. There is a subset to this which is 26-6 but neither of these teams apply to that subset this year. Without the subset, it is still a money making 18-12-2. Road teams are 16-8-1 and home teams are 28-10-1. During those 32 years, there have been four years where both the better defensive teams lost against the spread (one other year where this situation went 0-1-1) and there have been 16 years where it has gone 2-0 against the spread. So, in the 32 years of the CC game, you would have had 16 winning years, 5 losing years and 11 years where it broke even (minus the juice).

This year, Tampa Bay allowed 12.3 points per game during the regular season, Philadelphia allowed 15.1 ppg, Tennessee allowed 20.3 ppg and Oakland allowed 19.0 ppg. Take special notice of the Tampa Bay (12.3) and the Tennessee (20.3). Those two numbers will key your winning selections this week.

Home team in caps. All records against the spread unless otherwise noted. All seasonal stats listed are for regular season games only.

League averages for comparison to the stats that will be listed below.

Yards Per Rush (YPR) 4.2
Yards Per Pass (YPS) 5.9
Yards Per Play (YPPL) 5.2

PHILADELPHIA -4 Tampa Bay 34

I'm really amazed at how little respect TB is getting in this game. And people who are suggesting that Philadelphia will win this game easily because of the past contests between these two teams and because of TB's perceived lack of offense, just aren't reading the whole picture. First, forget about the last two years where Philadelphia beat this TB team in the playoffs here in Philadelphia. Why can we forget these two games? First of all, it's John Gruden coaching TB now and not Tony Dungy. Second, this is a completely different team, especially on defense. Remember the better defensive team in the CC game is now 44-18-2 since 1970. TB is allowing a staggering 12.3 points per game this year. If you think the Bears defense of 1985 was one of the best defenses ever, you better remember the 2002 TB defense. Chicago allowed 12.4 ppg that year. TB is allowing 12.3 ppg. That Chicago defense allowed 4.4 yppl while this TB defense is allowing just 4.2 yppl. That Chicago defense intercepted 34 passes. This TB defense intercepted 34 passes. The Bears defense did have 63 sacks compared to only 43 for TB but other than that, the TB defense is slightly better than the Chicago defense. I keep hearing questions like how is TB going to score on Philly. Well, how is Philly going to score on TB? You might say they have done it the past couple of years. Well, the TB defense isn't the same defense that we saw the past couple of years. Again, they are allowing just 12.3 ppg. Three years ago, they had a great defense that was allowing just 14.7 points per game and they went into St. Louis and held the high flying Rams offense to just 11 points. Remember that was the fourth best offense (points per game average of 32.9) since 1983. And that TB defense was allowing 14.7 points per game. This unit is allowing just 12.3 ppg. The last two years when TB has gone to Philly, their defense has allowed 17 and 18 ppg. That's five and six points more per game than they are allowing this year! You might say they already beat TB here in Philly this year (against this year's defense and John Gruden) but I would say this is a different team now than then. Gruden was still trying to get his offense straight at that time. For the season, TB's offense is averaging 21.6 points per game. But we know how bad their offense is when Brad Johnson isn't in there. When Johnson has played this year, they are averaging 24.0 ppg. And since that Philadelphia loss, TB is averaging 27.1 ppg (counting

last weeks game). Prior to the Philadelphia game, they were averaging just 23.8 ppg (when Johnson played).

Philadelphia didn't look too efficient last week against Atlanta. And something has happened to this Philly defense since the McNabb injury. Before McNabb's injury, Philadelphia was averaging 5.1 ypr and allowing just 3.9 ypr. Since his injury, they have averaged just 3.5 ypr (also averaged just 3.5 ypr against Atlanta last week with McNabb) and are allowing a staggering 4.9 ypr. They allowed Atlanta just 3.9 ypr last week but teams are finding ways to run on this team. I'm not suggesting TB will run wild on Philly this week but I do think they can match the nearly 4.0 ypr that they got in the first game against Philly this year. Philly ran for 159 yards on 34 attempts in that game but Duece Staley had 57 of those yards on a carry at the end of the game, which means they only gained 102 yards on 33 attempts prior to that for 3.1 ypr. So, there is no reason to think Philly can run on this TB team. McNabb only ran for four yards on six attempts in their previous meeting this year and TB has shut down the quicker quarterbacks this year, evidenced by their domination of Michael Vick in two previous meetings. So, I don't see how Philly will generate any offense. The running game was shut down before and the TB pass defense is simply outstanding. They are allowing just 4.5 yps against teams averaging 5.8 yps and they held Philly to a measly 4.1 yps in their first meeting.

The Philly defense is excellent as well and I expect them to put a lot of pressure on Brad Johnson and he probably won't escape some of that pressure. He was sacked six times in the first game (actually five times and Rob Johnson was also sacked once) but Gruden usually has some safety valves in his offense for Johnson to check down to. This game should be a low scoring hard fought battle that will probably end up within seven points, either way. The problem with taking Philadelphia (if you really believe it will be a seven point game either way) is it will be very hard to cover a line that is sure to be over four points come Sunday. While, if you take TB and the points, you have an excellent shot at getting the cover win or lose. How are you going to feel about 1 ½ quarters into the game on Sunday if Philly is down 0-10? They'll need two touchdowns and to win and that won't be enough to cover the spread. Meanwhile, if TB is down 0-10, they'll just need a touchdown to get the cover. I don't think Philly will score based on turnovers. Brad Johnson just doesn't turn the ball over. He's only thrown seven interceptions this year and never more than one in a game with the exception of two in the Cincinnati game. If TB can muster 10-14 points, it will be very tough for Philadelphia to cover this game. And the TB offense is much better as of late with Brad Johnson in charge. TB allowed 23 and 26 points to NO this year. That is a pretty good offense (and six points in the first game were on an interception from the punter to end the game) and they allowed 24 points to Minnesota. The Minnesota points were scored mainly because TB had the game put away. They also allowed Philly 20 points in the meeting this year but seven of those points were scored after a turnover deep in their own territory. So, it will be very hard for Philly to muster more than 14 points in this game.

More importantly consider this. This TB defense is a special defense this year, allowing just 12.3 ppg. There have been 64 teams that have gone on the road in the CC game since 1970. On nine other occasions a team has gone on the road with a defense that allowed fewer than 14 points per game (pretty equivalent to the great TB defense of this year) and faced a defense that allowed more points per game than the road team (meaning the road team had the superior defense). Those nine teams went 6-2-1 against the spread. One of those losses were the 1976 Steelers who had to face the Raiders without Franco Harris and Rocky Blier, so you could say those teams are 6-1-1 when playing with their starting line up. Also, if our road team was facing a team that allowed at least 14 points per game (so they weren't facing another dominant defense), our road team was 5-1 ats with the only loss again the '76 Steelers team. So, when dominant defenses go on the road, they come back home with the cover, more times than not. If I stretch it out to road teams who allowed less than 15 points per game, I get 9-3-1 and 8-2 if the home team had a defense that allowed at least 14 point per game (8-1 if you discount the '76 Steelers). In four of those 10 contests, the road team lost to this same team but went 3-1 ats in the CC game. So, excellent defensive road teams win in the CC game and they still win if they lost earlier that season to this same team.

Lastly, if you read enough information this week, you'll hear about home teams in the CC game that played on the road in the CC game the previous year. Those teams are 12-2 ats since 1970, meaning Philadelphia sets up just fine for the natural progression to the SB here. But what you won't find out anywhere else but here is that when the road team had the better defense, the home team was just 4-2 ats. So, if the home team has the better defense and played on the road in the CC game the previous year, they are 8-0, but only 4-2 if they don't have the better defense. So, that is negated a little bit here.

My numbers indicate this line should be anywhere from a pick 'em to Philly by 4.5 points. I'm pretty sure by Sunday, this line will be 4.5 points, meaning the value lies with TB. I also get a final predicted total of 34 or 35 points, indicating this total is just right. I would feel better about the under if this total was 37 or 38 but at 34 I just think there isn't enough room for error, should a couple of turnover's, etc. result in scores. The study I did above which resulted in a 9-3-1 record for the road team with a dominant defense, produced a median point total of 31 points in those games and an average of 32 points.

TB has the better defense. Their offense isn't as bad as people think and they don't turn the ball over (seven interceptions by Johnson this year). The better defense is now 44-18-2 ats, including 16-8-1 on the road and dominant defensive teams on the road, when not playing against another dominant defense, are 5-1 ats and 5-0 if you take out the '76 Steelers game. My predicted line says this line should be closer to a pick 'em than the 4 or 4.5 points on Sunday. Tampa Bay is a solid live dog here. TAMPA BAY 17 PHILADELPHIA 13

OAKLAND -7.5 Tennessee 46

We'll go from one end of the spectrum to the other end here. In the TB-Philly game I talked about the dominant defense of the Buccaneers and how well they play on the road in the CC game. Well, here we are going to talk about the porous defense of the Titans and how badly they play on the road in the CC game. First, we know the better defensive team is 44-18-2 in the CC game and that gives us Oakland in this game. I look at how teams perform, on average against the average of the teams they face. For the regular season, Oakland averaged 5.8 yppl on offense against teams allowing 5.3 yppl and on defense they allowed just 5.0 yppl against teams who averaged 5.4 yppl. For Tennessee, they averaged 5.1 yppl against 5.0 yppl and allowed 5.0 yppl against 5.0 yppl. Simply put, Oakland is better on both sides of the ball, and by a lot. I rate Oakland as my third best offense in the league while Tennessee rates as only the 14th best offense. I rate the Raiders defense (which is playing extraordinary as of late) as my fifth best defense while Tennessee rates as the 18th best defense. That is a complete mismatch. The Raiders went through a period early in the year where they allowed Tennessee, Buffalo and the Rams to average 6.7, 6.3 and 5.8 yppl. Since that time they haven't allowed a team to average more than 5.4 yppl. That 5.4 yppl was done by the Jets in their first meeting with Oakland. You saw what Oakland did to the Jets this past week. They allowed NY to gain but 287 yards at 3.8 yppl, including allowing just 3.6 yps. The one thing Tennessee does well is throw the ball as they average 6.4 yps against 5.7 yps. Those numbers are similar to what the Jets average and we saw what Oakland did to the Jets last week (3.6 yps). Tennessee won't be able to run on the Raiders as they average just 3.8 ypr against 4.2 ypr and they'll face my number one rush defense in Oakland, who allows just 3.8 ypr against 4.5 ypr. Oakland hasn't even allowed a team to average more than 4.9 yppl since that first Jets meeting. There is nothing wrong with the Raiders offense, which averaged 6.7 yppl last week by gaining 399 total yards, including averaging a whopping 9.1 yps. Their offense had been held down for a couple of weeks but for good reason. They ran the ball against Kansas City in atrocious weather conditions (averaging 4.7 yppl), averaged just 4.7 yppl against Denver (fourth ranked defense in my ratings) and averaged just 4.5 yppl on the road against Miami (second ranked defense in my ratings). Now they get my 18th best defense and they should do something similar to what they did to the Jets 24th best defense. Prior to those games, they only had one other sub par game. And in their previous meeting with Tennessee, they averaged 7.5 yppl and 9.1 yps in that 52-25 win over the Titans. Tennessee wasn't playing as well then so I don't expect the same type of performance but I do expect the Raiders to do the same type of damage in the air as they did last week against the Jets, a similar pass defensive team.

The real reason I like Oakland in this game (besides having the better defense, which is 44-18-2 ats in CC games) is because they face a very bad defense, in Tennessee. Tennessee is allowing 20.3 ppg. There have been 64 teams prior to this year that have gone on the road in the CC games. Tennessee is tied for the 10th worse defense EVER to go on the road in the CC game. Those other 10 teams that allowed more than 20 points per game and went on the road were 2-8 ats. The other part of this equation then is to look at the road teams offense. Maybe their offense can make up for the lack of their defense. Tennessee is averaging 22.9 ppg this year, so they are averaging 2.6 points more on offense than they are allowing on defense (22.9-20.3). Of those 10 teams who went 2-8 ats, if our road team scored less than three points more than they were allowing on defense, they went 0-7 ats. If they scored more than three points, they were 2-1 ats. So, when their offense can't make up for their inept defense, they lose. Those seven teams lost by an average of 18 points and a median of 14 points. Of even more interest is even though our road team has a poor defense, the total points scored in those seven games averaged only 36 points with no score totaling more than 44 points. The average score was 9-27. The last time a poor defensive team took to the road I

had a 5% play on the 2000 NY Giants, toasted the Minnesota Vikings 41-0. I expect another route.

Oakland has the better offense and defense in this game. Their defense is playing at an all time high for the season. Their offense, as shown last week, is also playing extremely well. It's very hard to imagine a team going on the road after allowing over 30 points last week and winning this game. Especially with as bad a defense as they seem to have. My numbers indicate this line should be anywhere from six points to 10 points. My final total for the game indicates the total will be either 45 or 47 points. The research I wrote above indicates this total will probably be a little lower scoring. I will recommend the under but Oakland is the more solid play here. OAKLAND 28 TENNESSEE 13

BEST BETS

YTD 62-48 +25.10%

3% TAMPA BAY +4 (Line should go higher by Sunday)

3% OAKLAND -7.5

SUPER BOWL

I would like to first thank Mark and the rest of the staff at www.onthepunt.com for allowing me to contribute my thoughts weekly here during the NFL season. Hopefully you have added a little money in your pockets over these past five months and learned something new along the way.

I continued my nice run during the second half of the season last week by going 2-0 on the best bets. That now makes eight winning weeks out of the past nine weeks. During that time, I have compiled a record of 40-20 67.0%. The wins last week brought my season record to 64-48 57.1% +31.10%.

Like last week, I want to talk about a couple of situations which exist for the Super Bowl. Last week I told you the better defensive team (team who allowed fewer points during the regular season) was 44-18-2 ats since 1970 in the Championship game. That record is now 46-18-2 since 1970 and in the 33 years of Championship games since the merger, this situation has produced 17 winning years, 5 losing years and 11 break even years (minus the juice). File this away for next year.

In the SB, that same defensive situation works. It doesn't work as well, producing a record of 19-14-3. That's still over 57% winners. That's not enough for me to play a team but is still a solid record. Although, since 1978, the better defensive team is 14-7-3 67%. Advantage Tampa Bay.

This week, I want to look at the better defensive team, but from a different perspective. One that I think gauges a defense better than just points allowed. It still deals with points allowed but it also looks at their opponents offensive averages. In other words, for this year, TB is allowing 12 points per game (rounded up or down) against teams averaging 22 points per game on offense. The TB defense is allowing 10 points less per game than their opponents. Oakland is allowing 18 points per game against teams averaging 23 points per game. Oakland is allowing five points less per game than their opponents are averaging. This would seem to indicate that TB has the better defense. If we can accept that for this research, we would then find the following for SB games played since 1983 (my team stats only go back to 1983). There have been 19 SB's played since 1983. The team with the better defense (using the opponents offensive averages as a gauge) are now 11-3-2 ats and 15-1 straight up. There were three years where both teams defenses were tied. The underdogs in those years were 2-1 ats and straight up. One of those ties was NE last year. And, of those 15 straight up winners, we're talking about three dogs the likes of Washington over Denver in 1987 42-10 as +3.5 point dogs, the NY Giants over Buffalo in 1990 20-19 as +7 point dogs and the Denver Broncos over Green Bay in 1997 31-24 as +11.5 point dogs. Overall, dogs are 3-1 ats with all three winners winning straight up. Advantage Tampa Bay.

The last situation is a situation which I take no credit for developing. This situation was developed by Dr. Bob of Dr. Bob Sports. His research only went back to 1984 so I have researched it all the way back to 1970 and broken down the research into the three subsets that he advises. It is to simply do the following:

- A. Play against any team who did not cover the point spread in their Championship game. The record of going against these teams in the SB is 5-1 ats.
- B. If both teams covered in the Championship game, play the team with more wins (including the playoffs). The record of the teams with more wins is an outstanding 16-0-3 ats.
- C. If both teams have the same amount of wins, play the underdog. This indicates both teams are about equal and taking the points is the best way to go. The record of these underdogs is 3-4 ats.

Overall, this system is then 24-5-3 ats since 1970. But if we eliminate subset C from the equation (figuring it's a toss up and neither team has an advantage), we end up with a record of 21-1-3 ats. Tampa Bay fits subset B for this year's SB. So, we have TB fitting a situation which is 21-1-3 and a subset of that which is 16-0-3.

I would never make a play on the SB based only on this situation, but it does point us in the right direction with either the hotter team or the better team (in terms of wins and losses), which has been a very good indicator over the years.

All records against the spread unless otherwise noted. All seasonal stats listed are for regular season games only.

League averages for comparison to the stats that will be listed below.

Yards Per Rush (YPR) 4.2

Yards Per Pass (YPS) 5.9

Yards Per Play (YPPL) 5.2

OAKLAND –4 TAMPA BAY 43.5

I took a lot of heat last week for predicting a Tampa Bay win. My reason for selecting TB last week was one of the best defenses to EVER play the game and an offense that is much better than people give them credit for. Nothing changes this week. TB still brings one of the best defenses EVER and clearly showed that last week. This week, I'll provide even more evidence as to why this just might be the best defense EVER to play the game. At least since 1983. And I'll show you better evidence as to why this TB offense is much better than people give them credit for.

The Raiders are playing great football right now. They have won convincingly the past two weeks over a very solid Jets team and the Titans. They won 30-10 over the Jets and 41-24 over Tennessee. For the regular season, Oakland averages 5.8 yppl against teams allowing 5.3 yppl and their defense is allowing just 5.0 yppl against teams averaging 5.4 yppl. They are well above average on both sides of the ball. I rate their rush defense has the number one rush defense in the league, allowing just 3.8 ypr against teams averaging 4.5 ypr. They are a full 0.7 ypr better than their opponents are averaging. On offense, Oakland's rushing game is just about average, gaining just 4.2 ypr against 4.3 ypr. Charlie Garner leads all running backs in the league with well over 5.0 yards per carry. Their numbers might be a little better but they run an awful lot of one and two yard runs at the goal line. And they don't run the ball that much. So their rushing numbers might be a little deceiving. The passing offense is outstanding, averaging 6.8 yps against 6.0 yps. They rank as the fourth best passing offense in the league, behind Kansas City (1.2 yps better than their opponents), the NY Giants (1.0 better) and Indianapolis (0.9 better).

But, they'll meet their match this week against Tampa Bay. The Bucs offense appears to be just average (or slightly below average), gaining just 4.9 yppl against 5.2 yppl. Those stats are regular season stats only and also include the three games that Brad Johnson missed. So their offensive numbers are probably about average. But on defense, their numbers are truly remarkable. They are allowing just 4.2 yppl against 5.1 yppl. That's a full 0.9 yppl better than their opponents. And their pass defense is simply unbelievable, allowing just 4.5 yps against 5.8 yps. If Oakland averages about 0.8 yps better than their opponents and TB allows 1.3 yps less than their opponents, we can make a reasonable assumption that Oakland will pass for about 0.5 yps less than the league average. That would equate to about 5.4 yps in this game for Oakland. How good is this version of the TB defense? Well, consider this. TB is allowing 0.9 yards less per play than their opponents are averaging. The 1985 Bears defense allowed only 0.6 yards less per play. The 2000 Ravens defense allowed 0.5 yards less per play. Those two defenses are regarded as two of the best since 1983. TB blows away those defenses. From a yards per play perspective, this TB defense ranks third all time (since 1983). The 1991 Eagles defense allowed 1.2 yards per play less and the 1989 Vikings defense allowed 1.0 yards per play less. But, neither of those defenses were as good when it came to allowing points per game. The 1999 Baltimore Ravens defense actually allowed 0.9 yards per play less as well. At any rate, this version is tied for the third best defense EVER since 1983.

Since games are won and lost on scoring, we can look at their defense from a scoring standpoint. As already mentioned, the Bucs defense allows (rounded numbers) 12 points per game against teams who are allowing 22 points per game. Or in other words, 10 points less per game than their opponents are averaging. We know Oakland scores about five points more than their opponents are allowing, so we can make a reasonable assumption that Oakland will score about five points less than the league average of 22 points, or in other words, about 17 points in this game. Back to that -10 figure. Going back to 1983, that is the best defense EVER! Next closest is the 1985 Chicago Bears defense, which allowed 12 points per game but against teams that were scoring about 21 points per game. In other words, about 9 points per game less. The great Ravens defense of 2000 only allowed 10 points per game that season. But they faced a lot of anemic offenses that only averaged 17 points per game for the season. So, they allowed just 7 points less per game than their opponents were averaging. Simply put, this TB defense is un-

real.

I also took some heat last week for saying what sold me on this TB defense was how bad they made Jeff Garcia look the previous week. Some responded back by saying the 49ers are a bad team, etc. My point wasn't that I thought SF was a good team. It was that Jeff Garcia simply doesn't make mistakes. I believe he came into that game having thrown just 10 interceptions for the season. He left with three more added to his list. The TB defense will get you scrambling and then force you to make errant throws and their speed will get them to the ball for interceptions.

The next response is always that the TB offense is not good. If we looked at every team in the NFL and I asked you to tell me which team has averaged the most points per game over their last eight games (for teams that made the playoffs, I am considering those games as well to count for their last eight games), who would you say? If you said Oakland, you are absolutely right. The Raiders have averaged 29.3 points per game over their last eight games. If I asked you who was second, who would you say? No, it's not TB yet. It's the NY Giants, who averaged 27.3 points per game over their last eight games. If I asked you who was third, who would you say? Yep, it's the Tampa Bay Buccaneers. I'm counting their last eight games with Brad Johnson at quarterback, where they averaged 27.1 points per game. Pretty close to the second best team over the last eight games, on offense. I know. People are saying they haven't played the same caliber of competition that the Raiders have. Well, I'm sorry, but they have. You see the Raiders accumulated their 29.3 points per game against teams allowing, on average, 22.1 points per game, or 7.2 points per game more. TB averaged their 27.1 points per game against teams who were allowing 22.0 points per game, or 5.1 points per game more. So, they actually played equally tough defensive teams. On defense, over the last eight games, Oakland has allowed only 15 points per game against teams who were scoring 22.7 points per game. TB has allowed 13.8 points per game (if you don't count the Brad Johnson games) or 11.6 points per game (if you count the Brad Johnson games). You could make the argument that he doesn't play defense so you should count those games. Either way, they allowed 13.8 ppg against teams who were averaging 23.1 or 11.6 against teams who were averaging 23.4 ppg. So, they have actually played better offenses than Oakland has played. The point here is Oakland is just a little bit better on offense than TB over their last eight games and TB is just a little bit better on defense than Oakland over their last eight games. It appears these teams are pretty equal and getting points with equal teams looks pretty attractive.

There's really only one other defense in the league that allows close to as few yards per play than TB does AND allows as few as points per game. TB allows 0.9 yards per play less and 10 points per game less. Miami allows 0.5 yards per play less and four points per game less. Denver is pretty solid by allowing just 0.5 yards per play less but they allow only one point less per game. The other two teams who are pretty close to TB and Miami are Philadelphia and Oakland. Oakland played Miami this year and lost that game 17-23. The total, interestingly enough, was 43 points in that game. In that game, Rich Gannon threw one interception and only passed for 162 yards at 4.5 yards per pass. Oakland only averaged 4.5 yards per play in that game and Gannon was sacked five times, which tied his season high (he was also sacked five times in Pittsburgh). There is no question the Oakland defense is playing well and TB will have their hands full against them. But, TB also played Philadelphia twice this year and, of course, just last week. TB averaged 4.7 ypp in that game and passed for 7.8 yards per pass. If you take away the long 71 yard pass they had, they still averaged 5.9 yards per pass. For an excellent Philadelphia secondary, that was very efficient passing.

Last, but not least, let me show you one other SB that reminds me of this SB. In 1990, the NY Giants defeated the Buffalo Bills 20-19 as seven point underdogs. Buffalo was coming off a 51-3 thrashing of the then LA Raiders. The Giants were coming off a 15-13 road upset over the 49ers. That year Buffalo averaged 29.4 points per game over their last eight games heading into the SB. They allowed a little over 18 points per game over that same time span so their defense wasn't playing quite as well. But the Giants offense was averaging closer to around 17 points per game during their last eight games (including a home loss to the Bills) and their defense had allowed just over 14.5 points per game. For the season the Bills averaged 27 points per game against teams who were allowing 21 points per game (Oakland is 28 versus 23) and their defense allowed just 16 points per game against teams who were averaging 19 points per game (Oakland allows 18 versus 23). Buffalo threw the ball very well averaging 7.0 yps against 6.1 yps (Oakland averages 6.8 yps against 6.0 yps). Meanwhile the Giants only averaged 21 points per game against teams who were allowing 21 points per game (TB averages 22 against 22) and the Giants defense allowed 13 points per game against teams who were averaging 20 points per game (TB allows 12 points versus 22

points). And the Giants didn't run the ball well that year either, averaging just 3.8 ypr against teams who were allowing 4.1 ypr (TB averages 3.8 ypr against 4.2 ypr). NY did throw the ball a little better but if I only used stats for Brad Johnson's games, I would come up with numbers that were pretty close to the Giants passing numbers. The point is Buffalo had a high flying offense against a good defense and the Giants stopped that offense and won the game 20-19. The same thing will happen here.

My final numbers, no matter how I use them, show TB winning this game by a couple of points, giving us great value at +4. The numbers also show the final score ending anywhere between 35 and 40 points, giving us also great value to the under. I'm a little more reluctant to play the under for as much as the side only because SB's sometimes tend to end up with freak plays or teams desperately trying to get back into the game and then making mistakes, but I think this under deserves a shot.

Other than trying to use some type of subjective analysis, there really isn't any reason to think Oakland is the right side here. From an objective type of analysis (the only analysis I consider when putting my hard earned money to use), everything shows TB in this game. The better defense (depending on how we splice it up) is either 19-14-3 ats or 11-3-2 ats and 15-1 SU in this game. The SB situation is 21-1-3 and the subset is 16-0-3. This TB defense is clearly one of the best defenses to ever take the field and their offense isn't far behind over the last eight games. We also have a similar SB in the past that shows us the better defensive team has a great shot in this game. And we have further evidence that this Raiders offense has struggled against a similar (but not as good) defense when they went to Miami. And last, but probably most important, we have a lot of value siding with TB in this game. Does this mean TB is a sure thing? Not at all. Turnovers will play a key role in this game just like any other game. But, they are clearly the side to be on this game. Remember this is the SB. It's a huge game for those playing in SD this week. But for me it's just wager number 113 and 114 in a long NFL season. Nothing more and nothing less. Enjoy the game. TAMPA BAY 20 OAKLAND 17

BEST BETS

YTD 64-48 +31.10%

3% TAMPA BAY +4

2% TB/OAKLAND UNDER 43.5