



2003 NFL SEASON
SIXTH SENSE SPORTS
WEEKS 16-21

WEEK 16

A ho-hum 4-3 week last week, producing a +1.3% profit. I say ho-hum because I started out 4-1, only to lose the last two and ruin what seemed like a possible big week. But, a profit is a profit, and I'll take it. The last six weeks have now produced a 31-16-3 66% record. And, the season record is still at 59%, so it's remains a very strong season in the NFL.

All side opinions went 8-7-1 last week and are now 116-97-9 55% over the first fifteen weeks of the season.

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

I also feel it's more important to look at each team's last five games as opposed to the whole season. Stats listed are for the last five games unless other wise noted.

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

Average Points Scored 21.0
Yards Per Rush (YPR) 4.0
Yards Per Pass (YPS) 5.9
Yards Per Play (YPPL) 5.1

TAMPA BAY -7.5 Atlanta 38

TB comes in still clinging to hopes of a playoff berth. Those hopes are slim at best but this team will keep fighting to the end. For Atlanta, things looked much better two weeks ago with Michael Vick back. Atlanta defeated Carolina at home and Vick looked tremendous in that outing. But, mid-week last week Dan Reeves was let go and Atlanta played a horrible game at Indy, losing 7-38. It wasn't so much that they lost to a very good Indy team, but they managed to only average 1.0 yps in that game, throwing for just 29 yards on 29 attempts, getting sacked four times. They did put up nice rushing numbers, gaining 125 yards at 4.8 ypr. But, they allowed Indy to rush for 178 yards at 5.7 ypr and throw for 287 yards at 8.7 yps. That totaled 465 yards at 7.3 yppl. That's not good. Was it because of the mid-week firing? Who knows. That certainly didn't help. The Atlanta defense had been playing well lately, allowing just 5.3 yppl against 5.1 yppl over their last five games. The offense continues to struggle but that is mainly in the passing game, where they are averaging just 4.1 yps against 5.6 yps over their last five games. They are rushing the ball for 4.5 ypr against 4.4 ypr over their last five games. Now they get TB. TB looked good last week in defeating Houston but that was a banged up Houston squad so let's not get too excited about the victory. The TB offense has been very average over their last five games, averaging just 5.0 yppl against 5.0 yppl. The defense continues to play well, allowing just 4.3 yppl against 4.8 yppl, but average against the run, allowing 4.2 ypr against 4.2 ypr. Atlanta should be able to find some success running the ball. Atlanta qualifies in a contrary situation, which is 302-218-11 (15-11-1 TY) and they are a turnover table play, which is 805-625-36 (36-29-4 TY). Final numbers favor TB by 9.5 (all games) and by six points (last five games) and by five points (Home/Away numbers). I have a tough time taking Atlanta simply because of the prior domination by TB against Michael Vick but Atlanta is the "right" side here and perhaps a look to the under. **TAMPA BAY 20 ATLANTA 14**

Kansas City -3 MINNESOTA 54

A few weeks ago I had no doubt KC would win this game. But, leading up to this game and now after looking at it closer, I doubt KC can win this game SU. That's very hard for me to say, seeing I bleed Green & Gold and would like to see nothing better than the see Vikings lose this game. But, unfortunately, that's not the way I see this game playing out. The KC defense has been bad all year long and it only gets worse on the road when they are playing above average offenses. KC has played four above average offenses on the road this year (GB, Cin, SD, Denver) and they allowed each of those teams to gain more yards per play than they average for the season. They allowed those four teams to average almost 32 points per game. Laying three points on the road is not a good thing when you are allowing 32 points per game. The median for those four games was 29 points so it's not like the 45 points Denver scored threw those numbers out of whack. They have allowed at least 24 points in each of those games. KC is allowing 5.2 ypr against 4.4 ypr and 5.7 yps against 5.5 yps over their last five games and those numbers are somewhat similar on the road. In the four games against good offenses, they allowed an average of 32 points per game against teams who average 25 points per game and 6.6 yppl to teams who average 5.5 yppl. That's not a

good sign for KC in this game, considering this will be the best offense they have faced all year long. On the road this year, KC has thrived on winning games by forcing interceptions. If they have forced an interception, they are 5-0 SU and 4-1 ATS. If they haven't forced an interception, they are 0-2 SU and ATS. Culpepper has thrown but three interceptions at home all year long and one was late in the game against the Giants, when his team was desperately trying to get back into the game. I doubt he throws an interception in this game. Minnesota has faced only a couple of real bad defenses this year and that is Atlanta, whom they scored 39 points against and San Diego, whom they scored 28 points against. Both of those were on the road. So, I think it's fair to suggest Minnesota will score somewhere around 30-35 points in this game. Now you might be saying this KC offense is pretty good itself and will be facing a terrible Vikings defense as well. That is true but Minnesota has played much better on defense, at home this year, than on the road. On the road, they are allowing 28 points per game to teams averaging just 24 points per game and at home, they are allowing just 17 points per game to teams averaging 19 points per game. They are allowing 0.7 ypp less at home than on the road. Most notably different is their pass defense, which allows a whopping 7.1 yps against 6.0 yps on the road but just 5.6 yps against 5.5 yps at home. Now, Minnesota hasn't faced an offense like this yet this year. They did allow 30 points to a good GB offense, only seven points to a good Seattle offense (and no, Seattle's offense hasn't played that bad on the road this year, it's been their defense and turnovers), 20 points to a good Denver offense (who had injuries), and seven points to a good SF offense (who also had injuries). Against poor defense, KC has scored 42 points at Houston, 40 points against an average GB defense, 19 points against a poor Cincinnati defense (who is about as bad as Minnesota, but worse at home than Minnesota), and 28 points against San Diego. Those four average out to about 32 points. But, the numbers vary a little more from 19 points to 42 points. The median is 34 points. KC thrives with their passing game, which consists of their TE, running back and downfield to their receivers, or in other words, a full compliment of bodies to hurt you. Minnesota has played two other teams at home that throw the ball well, on the road, with a full compliment of players to do damage. Those teams are the Giants (when they were healthy) and the Packers. They allowed 29 and 30 points to those two teams. So, it appears this will be a high scoring game, where points are the better option. Minnesota qualifies in some terrific situations this week, while KC qualifies in some negative situations. KC qualifies in a negative scheduling situation, which is a 74-38-3 (5-2 TY) play against situation. That same situation played against Minnesota last week. KC also qualifies in another negative scheduling situation, which is a 98-52-3 play against situation. The Vikings are a turnover table play, which is 805-625-36 (36-29-4 TY) and Minnesota qualifies in a last home game situation, which is 64-32-4. Minnesota also qualifies in a couple of fundamental rushing situations, which are 75-30-4 and 46-12-3. Final numbers, before accounting for the situations Minnesota qualifies in, show KC by two points (all games), 3.5 points (last five games) and by two points (home/away numbers). This game also qualifies in an over situation, which is 36-13-1. I was reluctant to go over in this game because my general numbers don't support such a high total, showing 55 points (all games), 52 points (last five games) and 46 points (home/away games). But, when I break down the numbers as I have here, against good and bad offenses and defenses, I think we have an excellent chance at both teams reaching 30 points each. The only fear would be Minnesota getting ahead by a comfortable margin and resorting to running the ball to keep their defense off the field. But, I think the KC offense is good enough to stay in this game and force Minnesota to move the ball through the air as well. Lastly, KC hasn't won a road game by more than seven points all year against a good team. That means Minnesota should stay in this game to the end, always having the ability to get a late score and cover. And, Minnesota is now 20-6 ATS as a home dog (or pick) since 1990 and 10-0 ATS when facing a team with a win percentage of .800 or greater. **MINNESOTA 35 KANSAS CITY 30**

New England -3 NY JETS 35

Have to certainly respect what Bill Belichick has done to this point with this NE team. After all, I believe they only have two Pro Bowlers, yet have the best record in the league. That's a testimony to Belichick and his staff. But, as good as NE is and has played, this is not a good spot for them and their games have been much closer than one might think with a 12-2 team. Maybe that's just another credit to Belichick because his teams win the close games, but I think they are ripe to lose a game against a Jets team that is playing well. Over the last ten years in NY, NE has won only three games by more than three points here and only two by more than four points. One was last year, but that was when the Jets still had Vinny at quarterback early in the season. The previous game had a bad defense and good offense (KC) laying points on the road. This game has a below average offense but good defense laying points on the road. NE still can't run the ball, averaging just 2.7 ypr against 3.9 ypr over their last five games and the offense, as a whole, is averaging just 4.4 ypp against 4.8 ypp over their last five games. The defense continues to play terrific, allowing just 4.1 ypp against 4.7 ypp over their last five games. And, on the road

this year, they have been great, allowing just 4.4 yppl against 5.3 yppl. For the Jets, they have been playing solid ball as of late, gaining 5.4 yppl against 4.7 yppl over their last five games. That includes rushing for 4.3 ypr against 3.7 ypr and throwing for 6.4 yps against 5.4 yps. The defense has been average, allowing 5.2 yppl against 5.1 yppl. NY had allowed a long string of 100 yard rushers this year, doing so in six straight games and ten of eleven games at one point. But, in the three games they haven't allowed a 100 yard rusher, which has been two of their past three, they are 3-0 SU. All three of those games came at home against Buffalo (who was banged up), against Tennessee and last week against Pittsburgh. NE has only rushed for 100 yards in five games this year so it isn't like they need to get to 100 yards to win their games. The Jets pass defense has been below average on the road this year but is above average at home, allowing 5.5 yps against 5.6 yps. It's much different when laying points on the road and despite all the success NE has had this year, this is only the second game they will be laying points on the road. They failed in their first try, winning SU at Houston 23-20 in OT, laying -5.5 points. They did dominate that game from a stats perspective but turnovers and missed opportunities did them in. NE has had what could be considered lucky or close wins this year on the road. They have defeated Philadelphia soundly early in the year when Philly wasn't playing very well. They lost to Washington by three points, defeated Miami by six in OT and should have lost that game if not for missed field goals by Miami. They beat Denver on a last second touchdown by four, beat Houston by three in OT, although they did dominate that game and beat Indy by four, again holding Indy on a last second try for a score, although they led comfortably that whole game. The point being, when getting points on the road, their covers are rather easy, but when being asked to lay points on the road, these games would be much closer to not covering. Surprisingly, Belichick has only been favored on the road in eight games in his career with NE. He is now 2-6 ATS in those games, including being 0-5 ATS when laying less than six points. Meaning, in the real close games, he has failed. Jets haven't lost a home game by more than three points since Pennington came back to start. And, as you would expect, they qualify in some terrific situations this weekend. NY qualifies in a momentum home dog situation, which is 155-105-10 (3-0 TY). They also qualify in a turnover situation, which is 76-29-1 and a turnover table subset, which is 141-82-4. Once again, I have talked all season about teams not covering versus teams who are covering. The play is on the teams not covering and the Jets qualify in a situation, based on that premise, which is 277-183-21 (12-8-2 TY). Final numbers favor the Jets by 3.5 points (all games), by .5 point (last five games) and NE by three points (home/away games). The Jets are playing well and qualify in terrific situations this week against a NE team who has played great "team" ball, but I think their good fortunes run out this week. **NY JETS 20 NEW ENGLAND 13**

BUFFALO -1.5 Miami 34

Miami is beginning to finish the season just like they seem to do every season, by losing. They are now 20-41-2 ATS in the month of December (regular season) since 1988. That record includes being 16-19-2 at home and 4-22-0 on the road. That record also includes a record of 2-11 on the road in December in northern cities, playing outside, where it is considerably colder than it is in Miami. Nine of those thirteen games, they have lost by three or more points. Miami's offense continues to play below average, gaining just 4.5 yppl against 4.8 yppl. The defense is playing well, allowing just 4.7 yppl against 4.9 yppl. The Bills continue to play better and they are rushing the ball extremely well right now, averaging 4.8 ypr against 4.0 ypr over their last five games. They still struggle throwing the ball, averaging just 4.9 yps against 6.3 yps. Meanwhile, the defense continues to play better than any other teams in the league. They allow only 16 points per game and only TB allows fewer points per game. NE is also allowing only 16 points but they have faced offenses that are averaging 20 points per game, while Buffalo has faced offenses that have averaged 21 points per game. From a yards per play perspective, Buffalo is allowing just 4.3 yppl against 5.2 yppl, which is tied with Baltimore for the best numbers in the league. Buffalo allowed Philadelphia 23 points early in the season, but other than that, they haven't allowed more than 17 points to any team at home. Those 17 points were to Indianapolis, who has a far superior offense to that of Miami. Buffalo has scored at least 10 points in every home game this year. I just don't see Miami scoring more than 13 points and the Buffalo offense has performed well enough to score at least 17 points in this game. Buffalo qualifies in a last home game situation, which is 64-32-4 and they are a turnover table play, which is 805-625-36 (36-29-4 TY). Final numbers favor Miami by .5 point (all games), Buffalo by 5.5 points (last five games) and this game even (home/away games). This game should also be a low scoring game and I would favor the under here as well. **BUFFALO 20 MIAMI 10**

Baltimore -3 CLEVELAND 36.5

Baltimore lost at Oakland last week, 12-20, but they controlled that game, stat wise. They simply turned the ball over three times to zero for Oakland and that cost them the game. The Ravens gained 319 yards to 265 for Oakland and 5.2 ypl to 4.0 ypl. The Ravens have won three out of four here in Cleveland since 1999. Baltimore's offense has improved and they are now averaging 5.0 ypl against 5.4 ypl, including 5.7 yps against 6.2 yps over their last five games (same time period that Anthony Wright took over). That may not sound like much but it is a huge improvement in their passing game over what they had before. But, during that same time period, their rushing offense is averaging just 4.4 ypr against 4.3 ypr. The defense continues to play well, allowing 4.3 ypl against 5.4 ypl. The problem for Baltimore is they have now played seven road games and lost five of those seven, including the last four in a row at Cincinnati, St. Louis, Miami and Oakland. For Cleveland, they put up a big time effort last week in Denver, only to lose by three in OT. Cleveland only gained 275 yards in that game to 417 yards for Denver but those numbers are very misleading. They actually out gained Denver, 5.6 ypl to 5.3 ypl and those are the important numbers. Cleveland is now averaging 5.3 ypl against 5.4 ypl over their last five games and allowing just 4.8 ypl against 5.2 ypl during that same time span. Baltimore qualifies in a negative scheduling situation, which is a 161-91-8 play against situation this week. Cleveland also qualifies in our play on teams not covering the spread against teams covering the spread, which is 277-183-21 (12-8-2 TY). But, Baltimore qualifies in a fundamental rushing situation, which is 533-406-33 (44-26-4 TY) and they qualify in a subset, which is 246-141-13 (18-10-2 TY). The situations go both ways and I will lean with what I think is the better team. Final numbers suggest a pick 'em (all games), Baltimore by .5 point (last five games) and Cleveland by one (home/away games). Numbers lean slightly to Cleveland but I like the fundamental situation Baltimore qualifies in. Cleveland has played three good teams at home this year and lost to all three by three or more. They lost to Indy by three, Cincinnati by seven and St. Louis by six. **BALTIMORE 20 CLEVELAND 13**

CHICAGO -4.5 Washington 34.5

Not much to play for here but pride. The Bears got the win and cover for me last week, but they were lucky to do so. They were out gained by Minnesota, 393-232 and 5.3 ypl to 4.3 ypl. For Washington, well, it wasn't pretty, losing 0-27 and getting out gained 326-161 and 4.5 ypl to 3.0 ypl. Bears are 3-0 has a home favorite this year, while Washington is 5-2 as a road dog this year. Bears offense continues to be anemic, gaining just 4.3 ypl against 5.3 ypl over the last five games and their defense continues to play well, allowing just 4.8 ypl against 5.3 ypl. For Washington, the offense is just as anemic, gaining just 4.1 ypl against 5.0 ypl but the defense is worse, allowing 5.1 ypl against 4.9 ypl. Washington qualifies in a contrary situation, which is 302-218-11 (15-11-1 TY). Final numbers suggest Chicago by 3.5 points (all games), by five points (last five games) and Washington by one point (home/away games). I will lean with Washington based on the situation. **CHICAGO 20 WASHINGTON 17**

ST LOUIS -6.5 Cincinnati 52.5

I've made a habit of going against the Rams this year, and at times, going against Cincinnati as well. While I believe both teams are overrated, at least the Rams are in an environment that favors them much better than Cincinnati. I think Cincinnati has had a great season and their team is certainly on the right track, but they are not there yet. Cincinnati has played just one game on the road this year against a team over .500. They lost that game badly to Baltimore, 13-31. In fact, since 1990, Cincinnati is just 1-16-1 ATS when getting less than 13 points and facing a team on the road with a win percentage of .667 or greater. That includes a 0-3 mark when Cincy is .500 or better. The Cincinnati defense has not played well over their last five games, allowing 6.1 ypl against 5.5 ypl. The offense has performed well, gaining 5.8 ypl against 5.2 ypl. They'll face a Rams offense, which continues to be just a bit above average, gaining 5.4 ypl against 5.3 ypl, and a Rams defense, which is allowing 5.4 ypl against 5.1 ypl over their last five games. Cincinnati has run the ball extremely well over their last five games, gaining 5.4 ypr against 4.6 ypr and that could cause trouble against the Rams defense, which is allowing 5.6 ypr against 4.2 ypr over their last five games. At home this year, the Rams have allowed just 4.7 ypr against 4.6 ypr so they have played much better at home, against the rush. On the road this year, Cincinnati has gained just 3.7 ypr against 4.0 ypr, so maybe the home/road dichotomy will prevail here. Cincinnati qualifies in a couple of similar negative late season situations that are based on their poor defensive performances last week and the week before, which are 42-14-2 and 75-32-2 and plays against Cincinnati this week. This game also qualifies in an under situation, which is a 304-228-11 (18-12 TY) play. Final numbers favor the Rams by 4.5 points (all games), six points (last five games) and by 11 points (home/away games). Those numbers also predict 53 points (all games), 58 points (last five

games) and 49 points (home/away games). **ST LOUIS 30 CINCINNATI 17**

CAROLINA -9.5 Detroit 37

Carolina won last week but, as usual, it didn't come easy. There really isn't any reason to think they can blow away the Lions this week. Yes, the Lions are one of the two or three worse teams in the league, in all likelihood, but Carolina just doesn't blow anyone away. Carolina's wins this year have been by 1, 3, 20, 6, 3, 3, 3, 3, and 3. Those numbers don't look like numbers of a team to cover a -9.5 point spread. Detroit has lost but three road games by more than 10 points. Now, I'm not here to suggest Detroit is a play this week, only to say Carolina isn't blowing anyone away. Carolina, known for their rushing ability, has been terrible running the ball lately. Last week it was for just 67 yards at 3.7 ypr and over their last five games, it has been just 3.3 ypr against 4.6 ypr. Their passing game has been solid, gaining 7.2 yps against 6.2 yps over their last five games and that should match up well against a Detroit pass defense, which is allowing 8.0 yps against 6.6 yps over their last five games. The Lions rush defense is allowing just 4.4 ypr against 4.5 ypr over their last five games. On defense, Carolina has been above average, allowing just 4.5 yppl against 4.8 yppl and they should have no trouble stopping a Lions offense that is averaging just 4.5 yppl against 5.3 yppl. Detroit qualifies in a contrary situation, which is 302-218-11 (15-11-1 TY) but they also qualify in a negative late season situation, which plays against teams who suffer poor defensive efforts in their previous game. That situation plays against the Lions and is 75-32-2. Final numbers predict Carolina by 8.5 points (all games), seven points (last five games) and by five points (home/away games). **CAROLINA 21 DETROIT 14**

JACKSONVILLE -1.5 New Orleans 42

Situations go both ways here as NO qualifies in a situation that plays on teams who get back to .500 after losing their previous game to fall back to .500. That situation is 104-60-4 and won with GB over SF a few weeks back. But, Jacksonville qualifies in a fundamental rushing situation, which is 136-58-8. Both team's offenses are above average, with Jacksonville averaging 5.1 yppl against 4.8 yppl and NO averaging 5.6 yppl against 5.2 yppl. But, the big difference here is in the defense, where Jacksonville has a decided advantage. They are allowing just 3.9 yppl against 4.7 yppl over their last five games, including just 3.1 ypr against 3.5 ypr and 4.6 yps against 5.8 yps. NO, on offense, is running the ball well, gaining 5.5 ypr against 4.4 ypr, but they'll find that a little tougher against Jacksonville. And the Saints pass offense is a bit below average, gaining just 5.7 yps against 5.9 yps. The Saints defense has been below average, allowing 5.3 ypr against 4.4 ypr and 5.5 yps against 5.3 yps for a total of 5.4 yppl against 4.9 yppl. That should work just fine for a Jacksonville offense, which is above average with both, the run and the pass, averaging 4.3 ypr against 3.9 ypr and 5.9 yps against 5.5 yps. Final numbers suggest Jacksonville by two (all games), by four (last five games) and NO by two (home/away games). I like Jacksonville. **JACKSONVILLE 23 NEW ORLEANS 20**

DALLAS -11 NY Giants 35

What can I say? The Giants are decimated with injuries and Dallas needs the win. But, remember this. The Giants are playing to win the game SU. The Cowboys are playing to win the game SU, not cover the spread. They will be content to win this game by ten or seven points, etc. Giants qualify in a contrary situation, which is 302-218-11 (15-11-1 TY) and are a turnover table play, which is 805-625-36 (36-29-4 TY). Final numbers show Dallas by 7.5 points (all games), by 13 points (last five games) and the Giants by one point (home/away games). That home/away games number is obviously skewed because of the injuries, etc. The point here is the situations lie with the Giants. You can decide on your own but I will almost always lean with the situations, which are a long term 55%+ winner. **DALLAS 23 NY GIANTS 14**

Tennessee NL HOUSTON

Very tough to make a call on this game without knowing who will be playing for Tennessee. Houston, meanwhile, has suffered some injuries over the last couple of weeks that have really hurt their performance. Houston qualifies as a turnover table play, which is 805-625-36 (36-29-4 TY). Final numbers suggest Tennessee by 8.5 points (all games), 3.5 points (last five games) and by 10 points (home/away games). This game also qualifies in an under situation, if the total is 38 or higher, that is 304-228-11. I will predict Tennessee to win by seven and let the line

decide where I lean. **TENNESSEE 21 HOUSTON 14**

PITTSBURGH –6 San Diego 39

Yet another game that nobody really cares about. I do have an under situation on this game, which is 79-43-1 (6-2 TY) and almost decided to play this game under, but decided to leave it off the card in the end. The SD defense has actually played much better lately, allowing just 5.1 yppl against 5.5 yppl over their last five games. That includes being above average against both, the run and the pass. At the same time, their offense has slipped back a little, gaining just 5.4 yppl against 5.6 yppl over their last five games, being below average with both, the run and the pass. For Pittsburgh, similar situation. Their offense has been below average, gaining just 4.7 yppl against 5.4 yppl but their defense has been above average, allowing just 5.2 yppl against 5.5 yppl over their last five games. SD qualifies in a contrary situation, which is 302-218-11 (15-11-1 TY). SD also qualifies in a fundamental rushing situation, which is 533-406-33 (44-26-4 TY) and a subset of that, which is 431-300-24 (33-17-1 TY). Final numbers suggest Pittsburgh by 4.5 points (all games), six points (last five games) and SD by three points (home/away games). I like SD, with the better running game, here. **PITTSBURGH 20 SAN DIEGO 17**

PHILADELPHIA –7.5 San Francisco 41

Philly continues to play exceptional football. They have now won nine straight games and are averaging a remarkable 6.7 yppl against 5.0 yppl over their last five games. The defense has been below average during that time, allowing 5.4 yppl against 4.9 yppl. Their rushing defense, which has been talked about for some time now, is allowing 5.5 ypr against 4.2 ypr over their last five games. The pass defense is allowing 5.4 yps against 5.4 yps. Perhaps some of this poor defense, if you will, is because their offense has performed so well. The offense is averaging 5.3 ypr against 4.1 ypr and 8.0 yps against 5.9 yps over their last five games. That is outstanding. For the 49ers, it's a very similar scenario to Philly, minus the wins, of course. Their offense is averaging 6.1 yppl against 5.3 yppl, gaining 5.1 ypr against 4.3 ypr and 7.0 yps against 6.1 yps. On defense, they are allowing 4.5 ypr against 4.2 ypr and 5.8 yps against 5.7 yps for a total of 5.1 yps against 5.0 yps. This game qualifies in an under situation, which is 304-228-11 and 18-12 this year. But, having said that, this game also has everything I look for when playing an over, including great value, suggesting 44 points (all games), 62 points (last five games) and 45 points (home/away games). It isn't often I will suggest to go against the great situations I use, but this is one of them. The total in this game is 41 points. Since their loss to NE, Philly has now scored at least 24 points in every home game this year, including 36 and 33 in their two previous home games. They have now scored at least 26 points in each of their last five games. SF has allowed 35 points at Minnesota, 44 points at Baltimore and 41 points at Cincinnati. Those three teams are the only teams they have played on the road this year, who are average to above average in their home contests in terms of yards per play. That averages out to 40 points per game. Philly has averaged 28 points at home against the four below average defenses they have played at home this year. That should amount to Philly being able to score around 30-34 points in this game. SF has averaged about 19 points per game on the road against the three average-to-below average defenses they have faced this year. Philly has also allowed about 19 points per game to the five teams they have played at home this year, who are above average on offense in their road games. As for the side, SF qualifies in a contrary situation, which has been fantastic, going 107-52-2, including 5-0 this year. SF also qualifies in a late season situation, which plays against road teams after poor defensive efforts in their previous game, which is 75-32-2. That situation plays against SF, so the situations cancel each other out. But, I will lean with SF, despite their 0-7 SU road record, because I believe they might be able to run the ball enough to keep this game close, even though the breakdown I just went through above doesn't necessarily support them. I do like the over in this game, despite the situation playing against it. You won't find me going against my own situations very often. **PHILADELPHIA 33 SAN FRANCISCO 26**

SEATTLE –13.5 Arizona 43.5

See the Giants write-up. Nothing I can say here can justify taking Arizona, from a fundamental standpoint. After all, they have lost their previous seven road games by an average of 24 points per game. Seattle has gone 7-0 SU at home and averaged winning those games by 12 points per game, including by an average of 24 points per game against the two teams with four or fewer wins this season (Arizona has three wins). So, this certainly has the makings of being about a 24 point game. Arizona qualifies in a contrary situation, which is 302-228-11 (15-11-1 TY) and they are a turnover table play, which is 805-625-36 (36-29-4 TY). Final numbers suggest Seattle by 12.5

points (all games), by 12 points (last five games) and by 23 points (home/away games). I'll lean with Arizona because of the situations, but you have to have a lot of balls to take Arizona this week. If this line were less than 10 points, Seattle would qualify in a bounce back situation that is 30-10-1. **SEATTLE 31 ARIZONA 20**

INDIANAPOLIS -4.5 Denver 48

I doubt Clinton Portis will play in this game. I've sprained my knee before and, although every sprain is different, I find it hard to believe he can come back in just one week, and attempt to take the beating running backs take in the NFL. Denver does qualify in a fundamental rushing situation, which is 533-406-33 (44-26-4 TY), including the best subset, which is 141-60-6 (12-6-1 TY). Denver is playing well right now, averaging 5.7 yppl against 5.3 yppl, including rushing for 5.5 ypr against 4.6 ypr and passing for 6.0 yps against 5.9 yps. Their defense has also played well, allowing just 4.6 yppl against 5.2 yppl. Indy is also playing well, gaining 5.6 yppl against 4.7 yppl, including 7.0 yps against 5.7 yps. The defense is another story, however, allowing 5.0 yppl against 4.8 yppl, which includes allowing 4.6 ypr against 4.0 ypr. All of these numbers are significant because Denver runs the ball well (5.5 ypr against 4.6 ypr last five) and will face an Indy rush defense, which is allowing 4.6 ypr against 4.0 ypr. And the great passing offense of Indy, averaging 7.0 yps against 5.7 yps (last five games) faces a good Denver pass defense, which is allowing just 5.2 yps against 6.1 yps (last five games). The situation favors Denver as does the match-up, regardless if Portis plays or not, I believe. Final numbers favor Indy by 3.5 points (all games), by two points (last five games) and Denver by four points (home/away games). Denver lost by one against a similar Kansas City team on the road and they were blown out at Minnesota and Baltimore but those games were without Plummer. Indy lost to the only other team they have played at home this year that runs the ball well and is a decent team (or was running the ball well when they played them) and that is Carolina. I like Denver here getting the points. I also have a situation, which plays on the under and is 226-123-6 (10-6 TY). Final points, however, suggest about 53 points (all games), 57 points (last five games) and 46 points (home/away games). That's enough to keep my from playing the under. Unlike the Philly game, I will still lean to the under. Going under 48 points is much easier than 41 points and there is one good defense in this game. **INDIANAPOLIS 24 DENVER 23**

Green Bay -5 OAKLAND 44

Another game, which just like last week, Oakland qualifies as a best bet, but GB has a pretty good situation favoring them that I am not eager to go against. Baltimore qualified in the same situation last week, although they also qualified in subsets of that situation, which GB doesn't qualify in this week. I passed last week and it cost me a win, but I will remain consistent and pass again this week, although the overall situations favor Oakland to cover this game. The Packers season has been a strange season in that nobody could stop their running game for a four game stretch earlier in the year. Now, all of a sudden, they can't run the ball, but they are throwing the ball very well. That probably bodes well for them because teams will not be able to game plan against just one facet of their offense. I suspect they will try very hard to get their running game going this week. The Packers were in control for the majority of the game last week, lost the lead for two plays, and then took the lead back and were in control the rest of the way. They averaged 6.0 yppl last week and allowed 5.5 yppl to SD. Take out a broken coverage 68 yard touchdown toss to Tomlinson and they allowed just 4.7 yppl. The Packers offense is averaging just 4.0 ypr against 4.4 ypr over their last five games but 6.5 yps against 5.8 yps over that same time span. The defense has played well over their last five games, allowing just 3.9 ypr against 4.2 ypr and 5.1 yps against 5.7 yps for a total of 4.6 yppl against 5.1 yppl. Included in that was allowing a SD offense, which is averaging 5.0 ypr for the season and 5.2 ypr at home, to gain just 3.3 ypr last week. The addition of Grady Jackson has really helped the Packers defense. For Oakland, they lost a game to the Broncos three games ago, 8-22, but out played Denver in that game, only to lose because of multiple turnovers. Last week, they defeated Baltimore, 20-12, but were out played in that game, losing the yardage battle, 265-319, the yards per play battle, 4.0-5.2, but won the turnover battle 3-0. The numbers really aren't that impressive for Oakland, gaining just 4.8 yppl against 5.2 yppl over their last five games and allowing 5.6 yppl against 5.5 yppl, including 6.9 yps against 6.3 yps. The Packers recent success, both in the win column and on offense, sets them up in a negative situation, which is a 82-42-5 (4-2 TY) play against them here. The Raiders also qualify in a turnover situation, which is a 76-29-1 play that plays against teams who have been successful in the turnover battle over their last couple of games. Chances are that luck/good fortune will not continue this week. Once again, teams not covering the spread against teams who are covering the spread, are profitable plays, and Oakland qualifies in a situation based on that premise, which is 277-183-21 (12-8-2 TY). GB does qualify in a fundamental rushing situation, which is 533-406-33 (44-26-4 TY) but they don't qualify in the better

subsets of that situation. Final numbers favor GB by six points (all games), by 4.5 points (last five games) and by six points (home/away games). Because of the fundamental rushing situation, I will not play Oakland this week, but they do qualify as best bet potential. **GREEN BAY 21 OAKLAND 20**

BEST BETS

YTD 55-38-5 +30.80%

3% MINNESOTA +3

3% NY JETS +3

2% KC/MINNESOTA OVER 53.5

2% BUFFALO -2

STRONG OPINION

SF/PHILADELPHIA OVER 41

WEEK 17

A 2-2 record last week plus a winner on the strong opinion total in the Philadelphia game. The last seven weeks have now produced a 33-18-3 65% record. And, the season record is still at 59%, so it's remains a very strong season in the NFL.

All side opinions went 8-8 last week and are now 124-105-9 54% over the first sixteen weeks of the season.

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

I also feel it's more important to look at each team's last five games as opposed to the whole season. Stats listed are for the last five games unless other wise noted.

Many games this week mean absolutely nothing so some of the analysis will be brief in those games.

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

Average Points Scored 21.0

Yards Per Rush (YPR) 4.0

Yards Per Pass (YPS) 5.9

Yards Per Play (YPPL) 5.1

NEW ENGLAND –8 Buffalo 33.5

My two losses last week were on Buffalo and against New England. Despite getting five interceptions and being +4 in the turnover ratio, NE probably deserved to cover that game (even though a successful two point conversion would have pushed the game) as they out gained the Jets 5.4 yppl to 4.4 yppl. As for Buffalo, their defense played just as I anticipated, allowing Miami just 169 total yards and 3.0 yppl. The problem for Buffalo, as it has been all year, was gaining just 177 total yards at 2.9 yppl and losing three fumbles and being -2 in the turnover ratio, including a costly 74 yard interception return for a touchdown, which sealed the game. The Buffalo defense has played well all year long and well on the road as well, allowing just 4.5 yppl against 5.3 yppl. The problem has been the offense, which has gained just 4.2 yppl against 4.8 yppl on the road and 4.3 yppl against 4.9 yppl over their last five games overall. For NE, their defense continues to play just as well as Buffalo, allowing just 4.6 yppl against 4.9 yppl at home and 4.1 yppl against 4.8 yppl over their last five games. On offense, NE has played worse at home but I think that's probably a product of the weather and an aberration, rather than anything significant. Over their last five games, they are averaging 4.6 yppl against 4.8 yppl, but throwing the ball for 5.8 yps against 5.5 yps. Because NE can at least move the ball somewhat, compared to the Buffalo defense, that usually means they are getting better field position and allowing their defense to tee off on Buffalo and Drew Bledsoe. That is probably the difference in this game. Buffalo qualifies as a turnover table play, which is 808-628-36 (39-32-4 TY) and they qualify in a fundamental rushing situation, which is 239-168-14. NE qualifies in a last home game situation, which plays on good teams, which is 29-9. Final numbers favor NE by 8.5 points (all games), by four points (last five games) and by 9.5 points (home/away games). Final totals suggest 32 points (all games), 40 points (last five games) and 30 points (home/away games). I'll lean with Buffalo because of the situations. **NEW ENGLAND 19 BUFFALO 13**

SAN FRANCISCO Pk Seattle 44

The Seattle boxscore from last week was pretty interesting, considering they won the game rather handily (although the cover was in doubt and Arizona probably deserved to cover) but Seattle was actually -3 in the turnover ratio, which obviously helped Arizona stay in the game, cover wise. San Francisco played a terrific game, especially when you consider they lost Owens in the second quarter. SF out gained Philly 417 yards to 293 yards but the yards per play were even at 5.7 yppl for each team. SF sacked McNabb the second most times he has been sacked in a game this year, getting to him five times. It's been well documented about the Seattle road woes. I played Seattle two weeks ago, when they were at St. Louis, but they were getting seven points. Seattle has been competitive in all but two of their road games, so getting seven was fine. But, they are a pick 'em in this game, which might be asking too much, especially against a 49er team who has played terrific at home this year and doesn't appear to have quit. SF has too many young players playing for jobs and even Garcia is playing for his job

as is Kevan Barlow. Throw out the game against Arizona and Seattle has allowed at least 27 points in every other road game this year (six games). Now, go the other way and note SF hasn't allowed more than 17 points in any home game this year. So, if Seattle seems predetermined to allow at least 27 points and SF doesn't allow more than 17 points, that's going to make it awful hard for Seattle to win this game. Meanwhile, for SF, they have scored at least 24 points in all but one home game this year (six games). It certainly seems likely that SF will get at least 24-27 points in this game. Seattle has only scored more than 24 points in two road games and one of those games was against Arizona, which really doesn't count. Seattle has played well in their last five games, gaining 5.5 yppl against 5.3 yppl, throwing for 6.1 yps against 5.7 yps, but that will play right into the hands of SF, who is allowing just 5.2 yppl against 5.6 yppl and 5.7 yps against 6.4 yps over their last five games. Going the other way, the SF offense is playing very well right now, averaging 5.8 yppl against 5.2 yppl over their last five games, including running the ball for 5.1 ypr against 4.6 ypr and 6.5 yps against 5.7 yps. Seattle has played good rush defense lately, allowing just 3.7 ypr against 4.6 ypr but they are allowing 6.1 yps against 5.7 yps. Seattle qualifies in a negative scheduling situation, which is 99-52-4 and plays against Seattle here. San Francisco also qualifies in a last home game situation, which is a 65-33-4 play. The 49ers also qualify in a fundamental rushing situation, which is 136-59-8. SF would also qualify in four more very profitable situations if they were to become a dog in this game. Final numbers suggest SF by 5.5 points (all games), three points (last five games) and by 13.5 points (home/away games). This game also qualifies in an under situation, which is 305-230-11. That same situation played the under in the SF game last week and I ignored it because of the great situation I thought SF and Philly were in last week. This week, the numbers suggest a high scoring game, which is enough to keep me off the under, but I will still lean that way because SF has played so well at home on defense and Seattle has struggled some on the road. **SAN FRANCISCO 27 SEATTLE 16**

Philadelphia -6.5 WASHINGTON 40.5

This game means an awful lot to Philadelphia as a win still gives them a shot at home field advantage throughout the playoffs. A loss could cost them the division, which appeared to be theirs for the taking just a week ago. The Philly offense continues to roll, and they averaged 5.7 yppl in their loss last week. They are now averaging 6.4 yppl against 5.0 yppl over their last five games, which includes, running for 5.6 ypr against 4.4 ypr and throwing for 7.1 yps against 5.5 yps. For Washington, their defense has played better over their last five games, allowing 4.9 yppl against 4.8 yppl, but their rush defense has been terrible, allowing 4.9 ypr against 4.1 ypr. The Philly defense has been below average, allowing 5.6 yppl against 5.2 yppl, including a staggering 5.5 ypr against 4.3 ypr. They allowed SF to rush for 209 yards at 5.1 ypr last week. Washington isn't playing well on offense, averaging just 4.6 yppl against 5.1 yppl over their last five games. But, at home, they are averaging 4.5 ypr against 4.1 ypr and the passing game is, at least, respectable, averaging 5.6 yps against 5.8 yps. I don't have any situations on either side in this game. Final numbers suggest Philly by three points (all games), by 5.5 points (last five games) and by 11.5 points (home/away games). This game also qualifies in a total play, which is 77-42-2 (4-1 TY) and plays on the over in this game. Washington has played five teams this year that have poor rush defenses, and they have averaged 24 points (21 in three home games) in those games. Philadelphia has faced four poor rush defenses, and averaged 27 points per game in those games. The Philly offense has been on fire over their last six games, scoring 28, 33, 26, 36, 34 and 28 points. I just don't see anyway they don't get at least 28 points in this game. Like I said last week, their offense is so good right now, their defense gives up points just because. The average points scored in the NFL are 42 and we have two below average defenses and one above average offense. So, all we need here is an average scoring game, which we've normally seen in Philadelphia games as of late. Final numbers suggest 49 points (all games), 51 points (last five games) and 39 points (home/away games). I like the over in this game and will lean with Washington to stay within the number at home. **PHILADELPHIA 28 WASHINGTON 24**

St Louis -10 DETROIT 46

I don't expect the Rams to suffer their normal road woes here. They are in a dome against a much inferior team in the Lions. The Rams might be without Issac Bruce again, which could hamper their offense a little. The Rams offense is slightly above average, gaining 5.6 yppl against 5.4 yppl but their defense has been well below average, allowing 5.6 yppl against 5.2 yppl over their last five games. It's been the rush defense, which has failed the Rams, allowing 5.8 ypr against 4.6 ypr. But, it's doubtful the Lions can take advantage of that, averaging just 3.6 ypr against 4.5 ypr over their last five games. And on offense, the Rams have been solid with their passing game, averaging 6.7 yps against 6.2 yps over their last five games and that should play just perfect against a Lions pass de-

fense, which is allowing 8.0 yps against 7.0 yps. Don't be too fooled by the Lions cover last week. Their only two scores came on a punt return and by the defense. For the game, they were out gained 384 yards to 106 yards and 5.4 yppl to 2.6 yppl. At least they were balanced, gaining 53 yards each running and passing. Detroit does qualify as a turnover table play, which is 808-628-36 (39-32-4 TY). Final numbers suggest the Rams by four points (all games), 6.5 points (last five games) and by 4.5 points (home/away games). The situation leans towards Detroit so I will lean that way, reluctantly. **ST LOUIS 27 DETROIT 18**

CINCINNATI -7.5 Cleveland 40.5

Is there any reason to think Cincinnati, who needs a win to have a chance at the playoffs, can cover this game? Cincinnati has won eight games this year. None have been by more than eight points. Over the last five games, Cincinnati is allowing 5.9 yppl against 5.5 yppl and below average against both, the run and the pass, allowing 5.0 ypr against 4.5 ypr and 6.7 yps against 6.3 yps. The Cleveland offense has been below average all season long, and is averaging just 4.4 yppl against 5.0 yppl over their last five games. The Cleveland defense has played well this year, allowing just 5.0 yppl against 5.2 yppl and they'll face a tough Cincinnati offense, who is averaging 5.2 yppl against 5.1 yppl over their last five games. That's above average, but well below their season long average of 5.6 yppl against 5.0 yppl. Cleveland qualifies in a contrary situation, which is 305-219-11 (18-12-1 TY) and they qualify in a similar contrary situation, which is 162-109-4. Cleveland is also a turnover table play, which is 808-628-36 (39-32-4 TY). Cleveland's poor defensive performance last week does qualify them in a negative late season situation, which is a 76-34-2 play against Cleveland here. Cleveland has lost three games this year by more than seven points and all of those losses were to teams with winning percentages of .600 or higher. Final numbers suggest Cincinnati by six points (all games), by 8.5 points (last five games) and by three points (home/away games). I think Cleveland is the obvious side here. **CINCINNATI 23 CLEVELAND 17**

TENNESSEE -7 Tampa Bay 41.5

One thing I love is when teams win and lose in false fashion the week before. That usually provides the bettor with great value. The other area where a bettor can generate great value is when they find a team who is playing with need, which generally causes them to be laying more points than they should. That's exactly what we have this week with Tennessee and Tampa Bay. TB lost to Atlanta last week but their numbers were very impressive. First, Atlanta scored 14 points either directly from turnovers or plays that gave them the ball inside TB's 10 yard line. Yes, TB probably gained some of their yards in garbage time. For the game, they gained 440 yards at 6.3 yppl. Take out a 76 yard pass play, and it averages out to 5.3 yppl. Most impressive, which gets lost when you see Atlanta scored 30 points, is they only gained 267 yards at 4.7 yppl. So, TB played solid defense. It was simply four interceptions that did them in. This week they get Tennessee, who made a great last game drive last week to win against Houston. But, the Tennessee defense allowed Houston to average 6.2 yppl, including 5.1 ypr and 6.7 yps. Tennessee was incredibly hot early in the year, but they have cooled off tremendously over their last six games, failing to win any of them by more than seven points. The match-up in this game is also very intriguing. TB is averaging 5.2 yppl against 5.2 yppl over their last five games, which includes throwing the ball for 6.5 yps against 6.4 yps. So, they can throw the ball and they will face a Tennessee defense, which has been poor against the pass all year, including allowing 6.6 yps against 5.0 yps over their last five games. Tennessee does throw the ball well, averaging 6.6 yps against 5.7 yps over their last five games but they'll face a TB defense, which is allowing just 5.0 yps against 5.1 yps over their last five games. Tennessee has allowed at least 24 points in each of their last five games. That doesn't bode well against a TB team who has allowed more than 24 points only twice this year and one of those was 27 points to Carolina. If TB is able to get 24 points, it'll take more than 31 points for them not to cover this game. I just don't see a Tennessee offense, which is banged up, getting that many points. They have only scored more than 31 points in one of their past eight games. TB qualifies in a bounce back situation in this game, which is 71-41-2. They also qualify in another bounce back situation, which is 122-67-4. TB qualifies in a negative situation, based on their poor defense last week, which is a 76-34-2 play against them here. But, Tennessee qualifies in a letdown situation, which is one of the best situations that I have. That situation is now 109-47-4. It played on Atlanta last week, but Atlanta didn't qualify in the better subset, which is 92-24-2 (3-1 TY). It won with Cleveland against Denver a few weeks back and with Atlanta at the Giants about a month ago. So, it has held up when most people didn't think the teams that qualified had a chance. And if our play against team (Tennessee) is at .600 or better, the situation improves to a remarkable 61-12-2. That situation is simply too strong to pass up. I also have a play on the over in this game, which is a 77-42-2 situation. I'll pass on the total, although I think it has a chance

because both teams throw the ball well and the Tennessee defense isn't playing well lately. Final numbers suggest Tennessee by five points (all games), by 2.5 points (last five games) and by 1.5 points (home/away games). Final totals suggest about 40 points (all games), 52 points (last five games) and 36 points (home/away games). TB is now 11-1-1 as a dog of more than three points since 1997 (regular season). Way too much value and great situations to pass this play up. **TENNESSEE 27 TAMPA BAY 26**

ATLANTA -3 Jacksonville 43.5

I don't have any situations on either team here. Jacksonville does qualify in a fundamental rushing situation, but none of the subsets, and the situation is basically, a .500 situation without the subsets. But, I clearly don't understand the line on this game. Yes, Vick is back, but the Atlanta final score last week was very misleading. They took advantage of four interceptions, which resulted in 14 points directly or indirectly. Jacksonville certainly has something to play for as they are finishing the season strongly and would like nothing other than to go out a winner in this game. They have won three of their last four games. Vick might be back but he doesn't play defense for Atlanta and Jacksonville is superior on the defensive side of the ball and getting points to boot. The final numbers from last week's games against NO are a bit misleading as well. They show Jacksonville out gaining NO 374 yards to 350 yards and 5.9 yppl against 5.5 yppl. But, take out the junk 75 yard touchdown at the end of the game and the numbers read 275 yards and 4.4 yppl. Those numbers tell a much different story. Jacksonville is averaging 5.4 yppl against 4.9 yppl, including 4.6 ypr against 4.2 ypr and 6.3 yps against 5.4 yps over their last five games. That offense will take on an Atlanta team who is allowing 5.6 yppl against 5.0 yppl, including 4.2 ypr against 3.8 ypr and 6.9 yps against 6.0 yps over their last five games. Meanwhile, the Atlanta offense is averaging 4.4 yppl against 4.9 yppl over their last five games and they face a Jacksonville defense, which is allowing just 4.2 yppl against 5.8 yppl. Think about whom Jacksonville has played this year, yet their numbers continue to be impressive. I've been talking all year about Jacksonville out gaining and out averaging their opponents but losing the games because of turnovers. They finally started playing teams they can compete with and that turned around. Earlier in the year, they played Indianapolis twice, Tennessee twice, Carolina, Miami, Baltimore, New England and Tampa Bay. Final numbers suggest a pick 'em (all games), Jacksonville by 4.5 points (last five games) and a pick 'em (home/away games). **JACKSONVILLE 27 ATLANTA 16**

MIAMI -4 NY Jets 37.5

Here's one of those games I could care less about. The game means nothing and involves two teams who disappointed their fans this year. Both defenses have been above average over their last five games, while the Jets offense has also been above average and Miami's offense has been below average over their last five games. The Jets do qualify in a contrary situation, which is 305-219-11 (18-12-1 TY) and another contrary situation, which is 111-58-6 (5-3-1 TY). Final numbers suggest Miami by 3.5 points (all games), by seven points (last five games) and the Jets by 2.5 points (home/away games). **MIAMI 20 NY JETS 17**

Dallas -2 NEW ORLEANS 39

NO qualifies in some quality situations this week but I have a hard time playing them for three reasons. First, this team has been known to pack it in when things don't go their way. Second, they have numerous injuries, which will probably result in some key starters missing this game, including Joe Horn. Third, their rush defense, as Jack Del Rio suggested this week, is horrendous. They are allowing 5.2 ypr against 4.3 ypr over their last five games and 6.2 yps against 5.8 yps over that same time period, for a total of 5.7 yppl against 5.1 yppl. The offense has been solid, gaining 4.8 ypr against 4.2 ypr and 6.3 yps against 5.6 yps for a total of 5.7 yppl against 4.6 yppl. They'll face a Dallas offense, which is average at best, gaining 4.8 yppl against 5.0 yppl and a Dallas defense, which is just above average, at best. The defense is allowing 4.8 yppl against 4.9 yppl over their last five games. Dallas does qualify in a negative scheduling situation, which is a 99-52-4 play against situation. And, NO qualifies in a last home game situation, which is 65-33-4. Final numbers suggest NO by two points (all games), by 9.5 points (last five games) and by .5 point (home/away games). Still, with a bad defense and the key injuries, I will pass on this play. **DALLAS 21 NEW ORLEANS 20**

KANSAS CITY -10 Chicago 45

Here is another game where injuries could play an important role. The Bears are without Justin Gage and Dez White this week, depleting much of their receiver corps. KC was ripped last week at Minnesota, allowing the Vikings to gain 469 yards at 6.6 yppl. They allowed the Vikings to rush for 223 yards at 5.7 ypr and throw for another 246 yards at 7.7 yps. The Bears faced a similar bad rush defense last week in Washington, and gained 191 yards at 4.8 ypr. They could do the same here seeing Detroit gained over 100 yards a few weeks back at KC. Over the last five games, Chicago is averaging just 3.8 ypr against 4.4 ypr and 4.7 yppl against 5.1 yppl. The defense has played well, allowing just 5.1 yppl against 5.4 yppl. They'll face a KC offense, which is averaging 6.3 yppl against 5.5 yppl. KC has been just average rushing the ball on the road but above average at home and the Bears passing offense has really suffered on the road. KC does qualify in a negative momentum situation based on their poor defensive effort last week, which is 82-45-5. That situation is only 1-7 this year and played on Detroit two weeks ago here and lost. KC qualifies in a last home game situation, which is a 29-9 play. With the injuries and the lack of a good offense, along with Grossman getting his first road start in a hostile environment, I find it hard to believe Chicago can keep it competitive here. Final numbers suggest KC by 14 points (all games), by five points (last five games) and by 16.5 points (home/away games). **KANSAS CITY 33 CHICAGO 17**

Indianapolis -7 HOUSTON 44.5

Houston played a competitive game last week against Tennessee before finally losing by three, 24-27. But, a quick look at their home games this year, and it figured they would be competitive last week and should be again this week. Houston has now played seven home games this year, and since their 14-42 debacle in their first home game against KC, they have not lost a home game by more than five points this year. That includes games against Jacksonville, Carolina, New England, Tennessee and the Jets. So, they have played some good teams in that bunch. For Indy, it's tough laying a bunch of points on the road with a poor defense. Indy has played seven games on the road this year and won just one game by more than seven points. It's tough to even mention the Houston offensive numbers because they suffered through injuries for a good part of the year, but they appear to be healthy again and it showed last week. They gained 326 yards at 6.2 yppl, including averaging 5.1 ypr and 6.7 yps. They also allowed 450 yards at 6.3 yppl, including allowing an average of 5.2 ypr and 7.4 yps. The defense hasn't been good this year and Houston has allowed 5.3 yppl against 5.0 yppl over their last five games, including 4.1 ypr against 3.9 ypr and 6.5 yps against 6.0 yps. Pass defense has been a problem for Houston all year long and it figures to be a problem in this game as well. Indy is averaging 6.1 yps against 5.6 yps and 4.1 ypr against 3.6 ypr over their last five games. The Indy defense has actually played better over their last five games, allowing just 4.8 yppl against 5.0 yppl, but they are still allowing 4.5 ypr against 4.0 ypr for the season. Indy has only faced two poor defenses on the road this year and they scored 55 points at NO and 29 points at Tennessee. Houston has faced three poor defenses at home this year and scored 14 against Kansas City, 17 against Atlanta and 24 against Tennessee. Houston was able to score 27 points against a poor Cincinnati defense on the road and 20 against this Indy defense on the road earlier in the year. I don't think they'll have a problem getting to the 20 point mark in this game and Indy has scored at least 29 points against every poor defense they have faced this year, scoring 33, 31 and 38 at home against poor defenses. This game is being played indoors, which should only help the Indy offense. Houston does qualify as a turnover table play, which is 808-628-36 (39-32-4 TY). Final numbers suggest Indy by 8.5 points (all games), by 7.5 points (last five games) and by 4.5 points (home/away games). I like the over in this game and the final numbers suggest about 50 points (all games), 41 points (last five games - remember Houston played without their starting qb and running back for two of those games) and about 52 points (home/away games). **INDIANAPOLIS 32 HOUSTON 27**

Carolina -5.5 NY GIANTS 39

This is a game I could care less about and it appears so do the Giants based on their play over the last seven weeks. I don't have any situations applying to either team here. Carolina continues to not run the ball well, but they are still throwing the ball with respectability and the Giants can't defend the pass, with a depleted secondary. Carolina may rest some players here, making this prediction even harder to figure. Throwing out the numbers is somewhat worthless, because of the Giant injuries. I will side with the team who is actually still playing with some passion. **CAROLINA 21 NY GIANTS 10**

Minnesota -7.5 ARIZONA 45

I won with the Vikings last week in an easy win against Kansas City. That was the first time I had sided with the Vikings since back in week three when they covered at Detroit. Since then I have gone against the Vikings five times in their last six games and won four of those five games, including three road games. Once again, a poor defense, is being asked to lay a lot of points on the road against a team who has played well at home. This play on Arizona would be stronger if Arizona qualified in some of my fundamental rushing situations, but they don't, so it won't be quite as strong as I would like. But, just like the Chicago game two weeks ago, they play on the road against a team who has played very well at home this year. Arizona has played some quality teams at home and either defeated them or played them tough. Arizona lost their first home game this year, 0-38 to Seattle, but in that game, they lost starting qb Jeff Blake midway through the game and Josh McCown was thrown into action and an Arizona suffered a -4 in the turnover ratio. But, since then, they have defeated GB by seven, lost to Baltimore by eight, defeated SF by three, defeated Cincinnati by three, lost in OT to the Rams by three, and lost to Carolina by three. At least four, if not five of those teams, are better or as good as Minnesota. For the Vikings, it's been four straight road losses in a row to the likes of SD, Oakland, St. Louis and Chicago. The Vikings defense has played better over their last five games, allowing just 5.3 yppl against 5.3 yppl, but at the same time, their offense has become mediocre as well, averaging just 5.7 yppl against 5.6 yppl. They'll face an Arizona team whose offense is below average, gaining just 4.5 yppl against 5.1 yppl over their last five games and allowing 5.9 yppl against 5.3 yppl. But, Arizona is a different team at home than on the road. At home, they are average rushing the ball, gaining 4.3 ypr against 4.3 ypr and the defense is about average as well, allowing 5.3 yppl against 5.2 yppl. Those numbers become much more competitive against a Vikings defense, which is allowing 6.1 yppl against 5.0 yppl on defense on the road. Poor teams (.200 or worse) as home dogs of more than five points against winning teams are now 57-21-1 (3-1-1 TY). Arizona also qualifies in a bounce back situation, which is 61-33-2. Arizona is also a turnover table play, which is 808-628-36 (39-32-4 TY), including a subset, which is 129-69-3. And, once again, we have our play on a team not covering the spread against a team covering the spread. That situation is 277-186-21. Final numbers suggest Minnesota by six points (all games), by 2.5 points (last five games) and Arizona by 1.5 points (home/away games). The value and the situations clearly favor Arizona in this game. **MINNESOTA 24 ARIZONA 23**

GREEN BAY -6.5 Denver 42.5

Denver will rest Clinton Portis in this game and possibly other starters as well who are banged up. Denver also lost at least one more starter on defense in last week's win at Indy. For the Packers, it will be very hard to play with the same emotion they played with last week. There is simply no way they can get back up like they were last week. They just have to be focused and get the job done. If they can get into the playoffs, the bonding that came about last week could take this team far. The Packers offense is coming along just fine over the last five games, averaging 6.0 yppl against 5.5 yppl, including 8.3 yps against 6.7 yps. The running game continues to struggle as of late, averaging just 3.8 ypr against 4.4 ypr. The defense has played terrific over their last five games, allowing just 4.5 yppl against 5.0 yppl, including 3.5 ypr against 4.3 ypr and 5.0 yps against 5.5 yps. And at home this year, their defense is allowing just 3.6 ypr against 4.4 ypr. That is significant when going against a Denver offense, which is averaging 5.5 ypr against 4.6 ypr over their last five games. The Broncos defense has been just average over their last five games, allowing 5.0 yppl against 5.0 yppl. That includes allowing 5.7 yps against 5.6 yps, which might play right into the hot hand of the Packers passing offense. The linemaker knows GB needs this game, and thus, has asked you to lay more than they should be laying in this game. But, I still don't think that will matter, as I think GB gets the win and cover here, with Denver getting ready for the playoffs and resting some key personnel. Not that it matters but back in 1996 Denver came to GB and benched many of their starters and lost that game 6-41 as 10 point dogs. Denver had everything wrapped up in the AFC and were getting ready for the playoffs. That's the year Denver lost at home to Jacksonville and GB won the SB. If this line were -3 or less, GB would qualify in a home momentum situation, which is 68-23-6, and if the line were four or less, they would qualify in a fundamental rushing situation, which is 136-59-8 and if they are laying six or less, they would qualify in a last home game situation, which is 65-33-4. The point being GB is close to qualifying in some strong situations, but the line a little to high. Final numbers favor GB by 3.5 points (all games), by 5.5 points (last five games) and by 2.5 points (home/away games). I'll side with GB because they are playing so well and the situations are close to making them a best bet. **GREEN BAY 24 DENVER 14**

SAN DIEGO -4 Oakland 45.5

One more worthless game on the board. I have numerous situations applying to both teams here, which negate both sides. Final numbers suggest SD by 4.5 points (all games), by six points (last five games) and by one point (home/away games). SD's offense and defense are better over the last five games and I'll reluctantly lean their way. **SAN DIEGO 26 OAKLAND 20**

BALTIMORE -7.5 Pittsburgh 38.5

I don't have any situations applying to either team here, but I'll lean towards Baltimore laying points with the better overall offense and defense. Over their last five games, the Baltimore offense has been average, gaining 5.4 ypl against 5.4 ypl, while the Pittsburgh defense has been slightly above average during that time. The Pittsburgh offense has been below average and I don't see them doing much in this game against an above average Baltimore defense. This game does qualify in an under situation, which is 305-230-11 (19-14 TY) and my numbers suggest only about 38 points (all games), 35 points (last five games) and 33 points (home/away games). The under might be a good play here. **BALTIMORE 23 PITTSBURGH 10**

BEST BETS

YTD 57-40-5 +30.30%

3% SAN FRANCISCO PK

3% TAMPA BAY +7

3% ARIZONA +7.5

2% JACKSONVILLE +3

2% PHL/WASH OVER 41

2% INDIANAPOLIS/HOUSTON OVER 44.5

NFL WILD CARD ROUND

A terrible week last week, going just 1-5, to end the regular season. That dropped the season record to 58-45-5. Luckily the first sixteen weeks had been solid and the poor showing last week still leaves me with a 56% winning percentage.

A quick look back over the last two years shows some amazing consistency. Last year, during the regular season, I finished 59-43 58% and this year, 58-45 and 56%. Last year there were 102 plays and this year 103 plays (minus the ties). The two year record is now 117-88 57%. The goal for me each year is 55% winners and produce a profit of +20% or better. Hopefully the playoffs will produce some more profit and I can finish the season strong.

All side opinions went 10-6 last week and are now 134-111-9 55% over the first seventeen weeks of the season.

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

I also feel it's more important to look at each team's last five games as opposed to the whole season. Stats listed are for the last five games unless otherwise noted.

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

Average Points Scored 21.0
Yards Per Rush (YPR) 4.0
Yards Per Pass (YPS) 5.9
Yards Per Play (YPPL) 5.1

A few notes about the Wild Card round. When looking at the wildcard round, I think it's important to understand the changes that took place in 1990. Prior to 1990, the two wildcard teams from each conference played each other in the "wildcard round." But, when the NFL added one more wildcard team in 1990, that produced a first place team playing a wildcard team in the "divisional round." The years previous to this saw just wildcard teams playing each other. And last year, another segment was added because of the extra division created in each conference. This produced two playoff games in each conference with each divisional winner playing a wildcard team. Now, some might say the wildcard version 2004 Tennessee Titans are better than the divisional winning 2004 Baltimore Ravens, but the Ravens do get the home game. But, it can be debated on who is better.

What's important to know is since 1990, when divisional winners started playing wildcard teams, the home teams have never failed to produce at least a .500 record SU, and other than two years of going 2-2 SU (1991 & 1992), they have gone 3-1 SU in 10 years and 4-0 SU one other year. So, in the 13 years, only two years have produced .500 years and 11 of 13 years have seen the home teams win at least three of the four games played.

Naturally all that is important is who covers the spread, but I thought the SU numbers were important this year seeing three of the four teams are laying three or less points or getting points. Prior to last year, we still had a wildcard team playing a wildcard team, which really isn't representative of what is happening now. So, I looked at only divisional winners playing wildcard teams in the first round. Those home teams went 16-11-1 against the spread and 20-8 SU. If the line was three or less or our home team was a dog, they went 4-2 against the spread and 5-1 SU.

The bottom line here is home teams dominate this round and trying to predict which road team will win SU is really asking for trouble. Over the previous 20 years, there have only been four years (20%) that the road teams have covered more games than the home team in this round, including covering three of four last year. Six times over the last 20 years, have more than one team in this round been favored by three or less (or dogs). During those six years, the road team has never covered more times than the home team. Three times they went 1-1, one time 1-0-1, one time 2-0 and one time 4-0. Again, the home teams are the safe bets here and looking at too many road teams could get you in trouble. Remember, history repeats itself more than you might think or like. Finally, home dogs are now 7-0 in this round. On to the games.

Tennessee -1.5 BALTIMORE 39.5

Baltimore has now won five straight games against Tennessee. They won last year's game 13-12 but were out

gained 402-199 yards and 5.4-3.6 yppl. For the season, Baltimore is averaging 4.8 ypr against 4.3 ypr but only 4.9 yps against 5.9 yps. During their last five games, they are averaging 5.5 yps against 6.2 yps so the seasonal numbers also include Kyle Boller's poor numbers. On defense, Baltimore has been very solid, allowing just 3.5 ypr against 4.2 ypr and 4.8 yps against 5.8 yps. For Tennessee, they still don't run the ball well but they continue to throw the ball extremely well, averaging 3.3 ypr against 4.1 ypr and 7.4 yps against 6.0 yps for the season. On defense, Tennessee has played well against the run, but that may be more of a product of teams throwing when behind. Tennessee allowed teams to average 3.8 ypr against 4.0 ypr but 6.2 yps against 5.9 yps. Tennessee has allowed two teams to rush for 100+ yards this year. They allowed New England and Indianapolis, when they played Indy in Tennessee. They lost both of those games 30-38 and 27-29. What are the chances that Baltimore gets 100+ yards this week? Well, they have rushed for 100+ yards in every game this year since week two. Granted those two teams throw the ball much better than Baltimore, but Baltimore has a chance if they can get their rushing yards. This game, like all playoff games, comes down to turnovers. That would seem to favor Tennessee with Steve McNair versus Anthony Wright. But, Baltimore hasn't had more turnovers at home since their game against Kansas City, which also included Kyle Boller. Their defense has done a great job of creating turnovers at home. When Tennessee has committed more turnovers than their opponents, on the road, they have lost this year. I think the side here is hard to predict. Tennessee is the better team with the better quarterback, but the situations favor both teams, making the side a pass for me. Tennessee qualifies in a playoff situation, which is 42-16-0 but that situation, up to now, has always played the home team, so it's tough to figure out how a road team will react in this situation. Baltimore has only allowed 10 points over their last two games, but teams allowing 20 or fewer points over their last two games, are actually pointspread losers in the playoffs. Baltimore qualifies in a negative situation based on that premise, which is 44-18-2 and plays against Baltimore here. But, teams coming off a win of 10 or more points are poor propositions and Tennessee qualifies in a negative situation based on that, which is 34-11-3 and plays against Tennessee here. Baltimore also qualifies in a turnover situation, which indicates the turnovers stand a good chance to go their way in this game. That situation, which is a subset of my regular season turnover table, is 24-7-0 in the playoffs. They also qualify in a fundamental rushing situation, which works very well in the playoffs. The play I like the best here is the over. The average points scored in a NFL game this year is 42 points and this total is lower than 40 points, which means these two teams don't have to even score the average points in a game. Yes, the Baltimore defense is very good and can be stingy at home, but Tennessee seems to be able to score against anybody they play. Tennessee has played solid defensive teams New England, Buffalo and Tampa Bay this year and averaged 30+ points. They also tend to allow teams to score against them and even if they run away with this game, they will allow Baltimore to score at least 17 points in this game. Tennessee has allowed at least 13 points in every road game this year and Baltimore has scored 44, 44, 31 and 13 points at home with Anthony Wright at quarterback. Yes, I realize the defense has accounted for some of those points but they will get their points at home. Situations go both ways but it'll take points to beat Tennessee and Brian Billick realizes that. **BALTIMORE 27 TENNESSEE 24**

CAROLINA -3 Dallas 34

Yet another game where the situations favor both teams, making the side here hard to predict. Carolina likes to run the ball, but their rushing offense has been horrible as of late, averaging just 3.5 ypr against 4.4 ypr over their last five games. Part of that is because Stephen Davis has been out. For the season, they are averaging just 4.0 ypr against 4.2 ypr but 6.3 yps against 6.1 yps. The defense is allowing just 4.7 yppl against 5.0 yppl and above average against both, the run and the pass. For Dallas, their offense continues to struggle, averaging just 4.9 yppl against 5.0 yppl and below average against both, the run and the pass. The defense has been solid, allowing just 4.3 yppl against 4.9 yppl. Dallas has allowed just 16 points over their last two games but again, teams allowing fewer than 20 points over their last two games are losing propositions and they qualify in a negative situation based on that premise, which is 44-18-2. Carolina qualifies in a divisional winner versus wildcard team situation, which is 40-12-1 and like I have been saying all year long, teams that don't cover the spread against teams who do cover the spread, are the way to go. Carolina qualifies in a situation based on that premise, which is 6-0 in the playoffs. But, Carolina is coming off a 10 point or greater win and they qualify in a situation that plays against those teams, which is 34-11-3. Once again, we have situations going both ways. I just find it hard to believe Quincy Carter can win a big road game. The Carolina defense isn't great but it is above average, and when Dallas has faced above average defenses on the road this year, they were shutout at Tampa Bay, 0-16, and shutout at New England, 0-12. Against better than average passing teams, Dallas has allowed 16 points (TB), 12 points (NE), 20 points (Carolina) and 40 points (Miami). That averages out to around 22 points or a median of about 18 points. Against good de-

fenses as a whole, Dallas was shutout twice, as mentioned, and scored 24 against Carolina and 21 against Miami. That averages to around 10 points. I just don't see Dallas getting more than 10 points in this game. Carolina has scored at least 15 points in every home game this year. I like their chances to get the cover. **CAROLINA 20 DALLAS 10**

GREEN BAY -7.5 Seattle 44.5

Never happy when I go 1-5, like I did last week. But, that one win was Arizona and not only did they cover but they won the game straight up. If you've been reading my write-ups for the last nine years, you know I bleed Green & Gold, and seeing the Vikings lose and GB win last week was like being in heaven. And it was even better sitting in a Vikings bar and listening to the Vikings fans rub it in for most of the second half. Man, did that bar get quiet and clear out fast. That's almost as good as in 1998 when Gary Anderson missed the only field goal of the season for the Vikings in the Championship game. Actually, for me, it was even better because it benefited the Packers. As for this game, it will be interesting to see how the Packers play. This is what you need to know and watch for with GB. They have dramatically improved their defense over the second half of the season. Over their last five games, GB is allowing just 3.5 ypr against teams averaging 4.4 ypr. Now, you say they haven't played anybody over their last five games. Well, that is partly true because they played Detroit, Chicago, San Diego, Oakland and then Denver's "B" squad. But, you need to recognize SD averages 5.1 ypr this year against teams allowing just 4.3 ypr. They held SD to 3.3 ypr. The Packers picked up Grady Jackson prior to the Philadelphia game and their defense has improved dramatically since then. During that same time span since Jackson joined the Packers, they haven't allowed a team to average better than 3.5 ypr at home. That includes playing against Philly and last week against Denver. Even though it was Denver's "B" squad, the Broncos have seemingly been able to run on anybody, with anybody over the years. The point is it looks like their rush defense has become much more solid. There is still some doubt because they haven't played too many teams that can challenge them both, with the pass and the run. They have played SF limited them to 3.5 ypr and 3.5 yps. I've heard people say the Packers lost at home in the playoffs last year and it won't be any different this time around. Those people clearly haven't watched the Packers over the last two years. First, last year Favre stated this team wasn't that good but he has said this year this team has a chance to do something. Last year's team was allowing 4.8 ypr, while this year's team is allowing just 4.1 ypr, just 3.9 ypr since Jackson joined the team and just 3.1 ypr at home since Jackson joined the team. Last year's team was missing key defensive personnel and two starting offensive lineman. This year's team is relatively healthy, with the exception of Joe Johnson, who was a mistake and Mike McKenzie, who should play but is battling turf toe. This is a much different team this year. The Packers are averaging 5.0 ypr against 4.3 ypr and 6.6 yps against 5.9 yps, while allowing 4.9 ypr against 5.1 ypr, being above average against both, the run and the pass. For Seattle, they are averaging 4.4 ypr against 4.3 ypr and 6.4 yps against 5.9 yps. The defense has allowed just 3.9 ypr against 4.2 ypr and 5.7 yps against 5.7 yps. Much has also been made about Seattle's road woes but I think that is a little misleading. They lost badly here in Green Bay and at Minnesota, but they were competitive in all of their other games and actually looked very good last week in San Francisco and played the Rams tough in St. Louis a few weeks ago. GB has allowed only 10 points over the last two weeks but, again, that's not a positive and the Packers qualify in a negative situation based on that, which is 44-18-2 and plays against them here. This is also Seattle's first playoff game in at least three years and teams who haven't played in the playoffs for at least three years are 28-7 if their opponent isn't in the same situation. GB qualifies in a divisional winner versus wildcard situation, but that situation isn't as good if our play on team (GB) has allowed 20 or less points in their last two games. Final numbers favor GB by seven points (all games) and by 8.5 points (last five games) so the line seems to be pretty accurate. I originally liked the over in this game but will pass on that for a couple of reasons. First, the weather should be in the 20's and that will probably hinder any long passes, which will obviously create potentially longer scoring drives. Second, assuming the Packers are ahead, Mike Sherman has openly stated he looks to start running the ball with about seven minutes left in the game to try and run the clock out. With the Packers standing a good chance to be ahead, that could hurt a total of 44 if you're looking to play it over. And third, since Jackson has joined the Packers, they haven't allowed a team gain more than 298 yards, with the exception of SD, who gained 424 yards. Again, they certainly haven't played the likes of Seattle, Kansas City and Minnesota during that time, so it remains to be seen how much their defense has improved. But, Sherman likes to run the ball to protect the defense as well, and that has translated into allowing just 14 points per game since Jackson joined the team. When Seattle has allowed at least 100 yards rushing on the road, they have allowed at least 27 points. The Packers are averaging around 180 yards per game at home, including 159 against Seattle in the first meeting. Again, the situations go both ways, but lean towards Seattle and I think this line might be a little too high, despite the numbers

showing it to be accurate. The real test here is if GB can hold down a good Seattle offense. If they can, then GB might make some noise in the NFC, seeing there is no dominant team. A slight lean towards the over, but with caution. **GREEN BAY 27 SEATTLE 20**

INDIANAPOLIS -3 Denver 49

Unfortunately, game number four where the situations go both ways. Next week, the situations will hopefully side just one way and we'll start to see some sides to start backing. Indy qualifies in a playoff situation, which is 42-16-0. They also haven't covered the spread in their last two games but that is actually a positive for them here as they qualify in a situation, which is 21-3-1 based on that. Indy also qualifies in a divisional winner versus wildcard team situation, which is 40-12-1. But, I have a hard time playing Indy because they just don't match up well with Denver. That showed in the first game and although the situations indicate otherwise, it matches up like it will happen again. Indy allows 4.5 ypr against 4.0 ypr and Denver averages 4.8 ypr against 4.4 ypr. Those numbers alone suggest Denver should be able to run all over Indy just like their last game. It's very hard to look at Denver's numbers seeing they missed Jake Plummer for four games during the middle of the season and then again in the final, plus many more players. Over the year's I've learned to trust the situations so I will lean with Indy but, again, I don't like the match up in this game. The total is also very high but my numbers suggest a higher scoring game so I will lean that way slightly. **INDIANAPOLIS 27 DENVER 23**

BEST BETS

YTD 58-45-5 +20.10%

2% TENNESSEE/BALITMORE OVER 39.5

NFL DIVISIONAL ROUND

Side opinions went 3-1 last week but unfortunately I was pretty conservative and only played one total as a best bet, which lost, and left the four side opinions on the table. The seasonal record is now 58-46 56% +17.90%. Last year at this time, I was coming off an 0-4 wildcard weekend, which dropped my record to 59-47 (eerily similar to this year) but bounced back to finish the rest of the playoffs 6-2 so hopefully there is more of that in the cards these next three weeks.

I do have another 4% play this weekend. This is only the second 4% play of the year. The first game was the over in the Minn/SD game, winning rather easily 42-28, going over the total of 44.5 That game was nearly over at half-time. I don't expect this game to be that easy but the situation, teams involved and the line allow us to have a decent chance at this total, even if the game doesn't go our way. Play it accordingly, nothing more and nothing less. It's just one game that stands a good chance of winning but is not a lock. There are no such things.

All side opinions went 3-1 last week and are now 137-112-9 55% over the first eighteen weeks of the season.

Last week I talked about how important it was to only look at the home teams because they had won at least three out of the four games SU for 10 consecutive years in a row. They did it again last week and that makes 11 straight years of winning at least three of four or better. I also talked about the three teams laying three or less points (or dogs) and if we knew they stood a good chance of winning straight up, they would probably also cover the spread. Those three went 2-1 SU and ATS. Keep this in mind for next year.

On to the divisional playoff round or round two if you will. Home teams continue to dominate in this round as well, but against the spread, it's important to know where to look to try and find winners. Over the last 20 years, there have only been three out of the twenty years where the home teams have failed to win more than two of the games straight up. In 17 of those 20 seasons, the home team has won three or more of the home games straight up and only one time in the last thirteen years (1995), which is important because the playoff format changed in 1990 and all home teams were coming off a bye week and facing teams not off a bye week. In the three years where they have failed, they have gone 2-2 SU. So, over the last 20 years, home teams have never failed to win at least half of these games, or two games.

Over those twenty seasons, home teams have been under .500 ATS only four times. Seven times they have gone 2-2 ATS and nine times they have been over .500 ATS. So, 45% of the time you would have won money betting all home teams, 35% of the time you would have gone .500 (lost juice) and 20% of the time you would have lost money. That's enough to probably keep you off the visitor but let's break it down a little more.

Over the last twenty seasons, home teams are now 46-31-3 at 59.7%. If our home team has more wins than their opponent, they are 42-27-2 60.9% (4-4-1 if not). That would apply to all four teams this year. Ironically enough, if our home team has allowed 20 or less points over their last two games combined, that is a negative. Home teams who have allowed more than 20 points over their last two games are 35-13-1 72.9% (7-14-1 if not (11-18-2 from the 46-31-3)). That would rule out NE this week and leave KC, St. Louis and Philadelphia. By the way, teams allowing 20 or less points over the last two games went 0-3 last week – playing against Green Bay, Dallas and Baltimore. One last caveat to all of this is if the road team is over .500 ATS, then the home team is 25-4-1 86.2% (10-9-1 if not (21-27-2 from the 46-31-3)). That rules out the Rams and leaves us with just Kansas City and Philadelphia for this week. Add in the fact that those 25-4-1 teams are now 20-0-1 since 1987.

To sum it up, home teams are still the way to go in this round. That can change for the next round but this round should still represent the home teams in your arsenal. And, then being able to do a little more research shows us which home teams perform the best. Good luck this weekend.

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

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

Average Points Scored 21.0
Yards Per Rush (YPR) 4.0
Yards Per Pass (YPS) 5.9

Yards Per Play (YPPL) 5.1

ST LOUIS -7.5 Carolina 44.5

With an understanding the great equalizer here is the dome the Rams play in, this Rams team is vastly overrated. I truly believe this is the last game they will win this year, if they win this game. I don't see anyway they can go to Philadelphia and win and a situation that has won 72% of every Conference Championship game over the last 33 years (46-18-2) will play against the Rams next weekend if they host GB. Again, the home field has greatly helped the Rams this year and that can't be overlooked but either can the stats from this Rams team. I've heard all week about how good the Rams are, especially at home, and they are 4-0 SU in the playoffs at home since 1999 (just 2-2 ats). But, let's take a look at some of the numbers from past Rams teams and this year's version. In 1999, the Rams were averaging 33 points per game against teams allowing 24 points per game (+9 points) and they were allowing 15 points per game against teams averaging 19 points per game (+4 points). In 2001, they were averaging 31 points per game against teams allowing 22 points per game (+9 points) and allowing 17 points per game against teams averaging 20 points per game (+3 points). This year they are still solid, averaging 28 points per game against teams allowing 22 points per game (+6 points) and allowing 20 points per game against teams averaging 21 points per game (+1 point). But, the big difference comes in yards per play and this 2003 version of the Rams isn't even close to those teams. In 1999, the Rams averaged 6.4 yards per play against teams allowing 5.2 yards per play (+1.2 ypppl) and allowed just 4.7 ypppl against teams averaging 5.0 ypppl (+0.3 ypppl). In 2001, they averaged 6.6 ypppl against teams allowing 5.3 ypppl (+0.3 ypppl) and allowed 4.7 ypppl against teams averaging 5.0 ypppl (+0.3 ypppl). This year, their offense is average, gaining just 5.2 ypppl against teams allowing 5.2 ypppl (0.0 ypppl) and the defense is below average, allowing 5.2 ypppl against teams averaging 5.0 ypppl (-0.2 ypppl). It's also interesting to note the Rams are allowing a whopping 4.8 yards per rush this year to teams averaging just 4.3 ypr (-0.5 ypr), while in 1999, they allowed just 3.5 ypr against 4.0 ypr (+0.5 ypr) and in 2001 they allowed just 3.9 ypr against 4.1 ypr (+0.2 ypr). This is not the same Rams team. In 1999, I played the Rams very large over the Vikings in this same game and leaned towards them over TB, only to see them not cover. In 2001, I played the Rams over my Packers and played Philadelphia in the Conference Championship game, both winners. Since week nine of this year I am 7-2 betting on or against or leaning on or against the Rams. So, this certainly isn't a bias towards the Rams and I would like to think I have a pretty good handle on this team.

Some will point out that since Marshall Faulk has come back the numbers are better but that's not true either. Their rushing numbers have improved from averaging 3.3 ypr to 3.8 ypr with Faulk. But, their yards per play have dropped from averaging 5.9 ypppl without Faulk to just 4.8 ypppl with Faulk. Part of that is probably the competition and part of that might be because they are running the ball more with Faulk and giving up on the bigger pass plays.

I'm not crazy enough to suggest a best bet on Carolina here, knowing the strength of the home teams in this round but I'm also not crazy enough to place a bet on a team laying this many points, when they average just 3.6 ypr and allow 4.8 ypr. Those are not numbers of a winning team, come playoff time.

I am leaning to Carolina because the Rams are just an average team laying a lot of points, Carolina is actually the better team in this game and Carolina is the type of team that gives the Rams trouble. Carolina averages 5.1 ypppl against teams allowing 5.2 ypppl, while the Rams are allowing 5.2 ypppl against teams averaging 5.0 ypppl. So, Carolina's offense is better than the Rams defense, from a yards per play angle. On offense, the Rams are just average, gaining 5.2 ypppl against teams allowing 5.2 ypppl and Carolina is allowing just 4.7 ypppl against teams averaging 5.0 ypppl. Again, Carolina's defense is better than the Rams offense.

My question for Rams bettors would be who has St. Louis beaten at home this year that is comparable to this Carolina team? They struggled to beat SF by three, defeated Arizona and Atlanta, which don't count. They did beat GB but I think GB is a much better team now than then. They got killed by Baltimore but managed to win that game by forcing seven turnovers. The Rams gained only 121 total yards in that game at 2.4 ypppl. They sacked Baltimore seven times. I doubt they will do that here against a Carolina team that has only been sacked 26 times all year. Baltimore has been sacked 41 times this year. They beat bad defensive teams Minnesota and Cincinnati and won by five over a good Seattle team, who is actually slightly better than average on defense. Meanwhile, for Carolina they have been a road dog four times and gone 3-1 ats, while losing their only game ats by four points and are 4-1 ats overall as a dog. Most important for Carolina is they went to Indianapolis to play a similar but much better

Colts team as 4.5 point dogs and won that game 23-20 in OT. The Colts defense is very similar to the Rams. They both have excellent outside rushers in Little and Freeney, both allow 0.5 ypr more than their opponents average (4.5-4.0 and 4.8-4.3). Both play average pass defense. But, on offense, there is no comparison. Indy's offense is head and shoulders above the Rams offense. It's not even close.

Again, the Rams have had plenty of trouble against teams who can rush the passer. I went back and looked at the teams the Rams have played at home since 1999 that can put pressure on the quarterback. This year Carolina averages 2.4 sacks per game against teams allowing 2.0 sacks per game. So, Carolina is above average in sacking the quarterback. I went back and looked at all teams that were above average sacking the quarterback, above average in allowing yards per play and above average in allowing points per game. The Rams have played 11 teams at home since 1999 that fit that criteria and they are 8-3 SU but just 3-7-1 ats and have only won three of those 11 games by more than seven points. And one win was this year against Baltimore, which I consider to be a fraud win.

My final numbers show the Rams should be favored by seven points (using a power rating number) and by seven points using a home/away scoring formula. Those numbers were achieved by allowing the Rams extra points for home field advantage in the playoffs.

The only point I'm trying to get across here is the public tends to get all caught up in the home field advantage of these teams but this is not a good match-up for the Rams in this game. If Carolina can keep the turnover margin to -1 or better, I think they cover this game. People tend to think Carolina is just a running team and if the Rams take away the run, Carolina won't be able to move the ball. That's simply not true. This team only ran the ball 52% of the time so they certainly don't have a problem throwing the ball and they averaged 6.3 yps against teams allowing just 6.1 yps this season. That's just as good as the Rams, who averaged 6.2 yps against 6.0 yps this season. Steve Smith and Mushin Muhammad are excellent receivers who will get open down field. On the road this year, Carolina has faced similar pass defenses in Indy and New Orleans and a better pass defense in Dallas. They averaged 6.6 yps, 5.2 yps and 6.5 yps against those three teams. Against similar poor rush defenses, like Indy, NO and Houston, they averaged 4.6 ypr, 5.7 ypr and 5.0 ypr. And, they even averaged 4.3 ypr at Tampa Bay. There is no reason to think Carolina can't move the ball against this Rams defense. I think the general perception is Carolina is only a running team and the Rams offense is much better than it really is. If I'm right that Carolina can throw the ball and the Rams offense is just average, Carolina will cover, if not win this game SU. If I'm wrong, it won't be close. That's why they play the games. The Rams do qualify in a situation that plays on home teams when the total is 42 or higher. That situation is 41-12-2 after going 1-1 last week with Indy and Green Bay, but again, I simply don't like this match-up.

One last note to this game. The Rams average 5.2 yppl against teams allowing 5.2 yppl for a difference of zero. Their defense allows 5.2 yppl against teams averaging 5.0 yppl for a difference of -0.2 yppl. Add the two together (0.00 + -0.02) and you get -0.2 yppl. Since 1983, in this round, there have been 29 teams that have played with a negative balance, from a yards per play perspective. Two of those teams played against each other. Of those 29 teams, only eight won their game straight up. And 12 of those teams were home teams and 11 were home favorites. Those home favorites went 2-8-1 ats, winning only three of those 12 games by more than seven points. **ST LOUIS 24 CAROLINA 23**

NEW ENGLAND -6 Tennessee 35

It looks like it's going to be awful cold in Foxboro come Saturday night, with temperatures possibly at zero. That's going to make it tough to move the ball in those temperatures. As for this game NE qualifies in a 45-17-1 situation that is based on their great ATS record this season but that situation is only 8-7-1 if the play on team allowed 20 or less points in their last two games. For whatever reason, coming off of two great defensive efforts, is a negative in the playoffs, especially in the first two rounds. That pointspread situation is 26-12-1 in the first two rounds but just 3-7-1 if our play on team has allowed 20 or less points in their last two games. Maybe it's because these teams get overvalued although the line rarely matters as teams in this round have covered the spread over 82% of the time if they win SU and over 75% of the time when winning SU as a favorite. Maybe these teams take things for granted because they think they are better than what they really are after a couple of good defensive efforts. Maybe they beat some inferior teams and are now playing much better teams or maybe their opponent gets even more focused realizing they are in for a dog fight. Whatever the reason, these teams don't perform well and teams allowing 20 or

less in their last two games went 0-3 last weekend. As for this game, I just don't see how Tennessee is going to be able to move the ball consistently against this Patriots defense. I had NE in their first meeting this year that NE won 38-30. To be honest, they were a bit lucky to win that game but they have continued to get better each week. NE has won every home game this year by six or more points so this number could be a key number. The NE offense isn't anything special, gaining just 4.8 yppl against teams allowing 4.9 yppl but their offense is better than Tennessee's defense, which is allowing 5.3 yppl against 5.0 yppl. And the NE defense is better than the Tennessee offense, allowing just 4.4 yppl against teams averaging 5.0 yppl against the Tennessee offense averaging 5.5 yppl against teams allowing 5.1 yppl. My final numbers suggest NE by six and five points so the line is pretty close to the numbers. I just think NE is the better team, is healthier and better rested for this game. If it weren't for the 20 or less points situation going against NE in this game, I would be on them in a best bet. **NEW ENGLAND 22 TENNESSEE 13**

PHILADELPHIA -5.5 Green Bay 41.5

If there is one game this week where the situations clearly lie with one team, it is this game. And they clearly lie with Philadelphia in this game. With that said, and admitting I bleed Green & Gold, I believe this game is a bad match-up for Philadelphia. Philadelphia qualifies in the 25-4-1 situation listed above, which is now 20-0-1 since 1987. If this total is at 42 or higher, they would also qualify in a situation that is 41-12-1, which is based on higher totals favoring the home team in the playoffs. It will be up to you, the reader, to determine if my lean towards GB is either the Green & Gold goggles I wear or actually a fair analysis of this game. Philly also qualifies in an against the spread situation, which is 45-17-1. That situation is based on Philly's excellent spread record this year and those teams seem to perform very well in the playoffs.

But, Philly, like St. Louis, isn't the better team in this game. Green Bay continues to play outstanding football, averaging 5.8 yppl against teams allowing 5.2 yppl while the Philadelphia defense is allowing 5.0 yppl against teams averaging 5.0 yppl, which indicates the Green Bay offense is better than the Philadelphia defense. Philly's offense is averaging 5.3 yppl against teams allowing 4.9 yppl and goes against a Green Bay defense, which is allowing 4.9 yppl against 5.1 yppl, which makes the Philly offense better than the Philly defense. Brian Westbrook won't play in this game, which could hurt their offensive production.

I mentioned last week that the Packers defense has really stepped it up against the run ever since they signed Grady Jackson and the fact the Packers had played much better defense as of late but against some poor offensive teams. Last week, Seattle moved the ball well against the Green Bay defense, but a closer look shows they actually did a very good job. They allowed Seattle to gain 340 yards (Seattle averages 352 yards per game), 5.0 yppl (Seattle averages 5.5 yppl), only 2.3 ypr (Seattle averages 4.4 ypr) and 6.2 yps (Seattle averages 6.4 yps). On offense, the Packers had their rushing game shutdown last week, gaining just 78 yards at 2.4 ypr but they showed they can throw the ball, passing for 319 yards at 8.4 yps. The Green Bay offense is very solid right now and they should see some success against a Philadelphia rush defense that is allowing 4.5 ypr against 4.1 ypr. GB ran for 241 yards at 6.5 ypr. Philly's rush defense had allowed 100 yards or more rushing in 11 straight games prior to their shutout of a Washington team that appeared to have quit. Even if Philadelphia looks to stop the run like most teams have as of late, GB will be able to throw the ball with their better than average passing game.

I use a formula that seems to rate teams pretty accurately. GB has averaged 28 points per game this year against teams allowing just 23 points per game for a total of +5 points better and their defense allows just 19 points per game against teams averaging 22 points per game for a total of +3 points better. If you add those two numbers together, GB adds up to +9 (6 + 3). For Philadelphia, they have averaged 23 points per game against teams allowing 20 points per game for a total of +3 and their defense has allowed 18 points per game against teams averaging 19 points per game for a total of +1. That adds up to +4 points better than average. From this we can see GB is the better team with a +9 versus a +4 for Philadelphia. You may or may not agree with this methodology but I can tell you that looking back over the last 20 seasons, there have only been five times when a team has had a rating of eight or higher and been an underdog against a team with a lower rating. All five of those teams were on the road and they went 4-1 ats. The most recent example of this was in 2001 when Philly went to Chicago as a three point dog and won the game 33-19. Green Bay is simply the better team in this game and the match-up favors them as well. My ratings favor Philly by only 3.5 points and my scoring formula only favors Philly by one point. This line, for whatever reason, is greatly exaggerated. Even though the situations clearly line up with Philly in this game, I'm

not biting. Perhaps it's because I bleed Green & Gold but I went against the Packers when they played in St. Louis in 2001 in this round but that was a much different situation.

The play I like the best in this game is the over. I really think this game is a slam dunk to go over the total. The last time the Packers averaged this many points per game was in 1996 when they won the SB. I'm not anointing them the SB winner but back in 1996 I knew their offense was good for 30 points per game and that is the same thing this year. They have now scored 31 or more points in five straight games. This game is on the road and they may not get their 30+ points, but they will get their 24-27 points in this game. Barring a barrage of turnovers, that is a given. Philadelphia, somehow, someway, manages to get their points and they have scored at least 24 points in every home game this year since their third home game, when they began to turn around their season. Against good defenses like Dallas and Miami (road game), they managed to score 36 and 34 points so they can certainly get their points against better than average defenses. In eight games against better than average offenses, GB has allowed an average of 24 points this year and 27 points per game against the three better than average offenses they played on the road. Philly played SF two games ago at home and lost that game 28-31. The SF defense is average, which is probably somewhat close to the Packers when you consider how they play against the better offenses in the league. The SF offense is balanced and similar to GB but not as good as GB. In that game, SF was without Terrell Owens for most of the game but they still allowed SF to gain 414 yards at 5.6 yppl, including 206 yards rushing. It should be pointed out in that game that two of the three Philadelphia touchdowns came on drives of 40 yards or shorter while all three of SF touchdowns came on drives of 57 yards or more. All three of these teams, SF, GB and Philly, run the same offense and are very familiar with each other. The first game between GB and Philly only saw 31 points being scored but the weather was very poor and GB ran the ball nearly 60% of that game, partly because of the weather and because of Favre's thumb. Brett Favre is the kind of quarterback that won't quit and his team is good for at least one late score if they are getting beat badly. If GB is winning, Philadelphia, at home, is good for some late points as well. So, I don't see how these teams won't be able to score late in the game if we need a score to help push this game over the total, unless the game is very close, but I can't see either team not getting to 20 points in this game. The average points scored in a NFL game are 42 points so we are asking two better than average offenses to go against two average defenses and score a normal amount of points in a NFL game. Lastly, GB has now played seven games on the road in the playoffs during the Favre era, where they have been installed as underdogs. All seven of those games have seen at least 44 total points scored and the Packers have allowed at least 24 or more points in six of those seven, including at least 17 points in every game. Final numbers, using three different formula's predict about 47, 53 and 49 points being scored in this game. **PHILADELPHIA 30 GREEN BAY 27**

KANSAS CITY -3 Indianapolis 50.5

Indy sure looked like a different team last week against Denver, winning easily 41-10. But, I think it will get much more difficult for them this week in Kansas City. Checking the write-up above for this round, you can see KC qualifies in the 25-4-1 situation, which is now 20-0-1 since 1987. These offenses are very similar, but the KC offense is a little better than the Indy offense. KC averaged 5.9 yppl against teams allowing 5.1 yppl this year, while the Indy offense averaged 5.6 yppl against teams allowing 5.0 yppl. The KC offense was a little better balanced as well, gaining 4.3 ypr against 4.3 ypr (which is just average) and 7.2 yps against 5.9 yps. Indy averaged just 3.8 ypr against 4.0 ypr (which is below average) and 7.1 yps against 5.9 yps (which is solid but slightly behind KC). On defense, both teams allowed 21 points per game against teams averaging 20 points per game but the KC defense allowed a lot more yards per game than Indy. KC allowed 5.4 yppl against teams averaging 5.0 yppl, while Indy allowed just 5.2 yppl against teams averaging 5.1 yppl. The Chiefs are allowing just 4.5 ypr, 5.1 yps and 4.9 yps at home. They haven't played an offense the likes of Indy at home but they do play much better defense at home. Playing in a dome like Indy does will also hurt their chances this weekend. Dome teams, when playing on the road outdoors are just 11-26-1 ats since 1970 when getting 10 or less points (or favored). This is also Kansas City's first playoff game since 1997. Teams playing their first playoff home game in at least five years (when not facing a team who is in their first playoff game in at least three years) are now 23-5-0. And teams playing their first playoff game in at least three years (home/away) are now 29-7 if their opponent isn't in the same situation. Seattle covered with that last week. My final numbers favor KC by 8.5 points and by six points. They also suggest about 48 points being scored. When the total is set at 42 or higher, the home teams tend to cover, going 41-12-1 when laying less than 10 points, after winning with Indy last week and losing with GB. Value and the situations clearly lie with KC in this game. **KANSAS CITY 34 INDIANAPOLIS 21**

BEST BETS

YTD 58-46-5 +17.90%

4% GREEN BAY/PHILADELPHIA OVER 41.5

3% KANSAS CITY -3

NFL CONFERENCE CHAMPIONSHIP

I've been in a slump over the last three weeks so you might want to tread carefully over these final three games of the season, if you're not already.

That slump included losing my 4% total last week in a game that played out, yardage wise, just like I thought. The Packers gained 381 yards of total offense, while Philly gained 363 total yards. In a normal NFL football game, that would produce a final score of 25-24 in favor of GB. Using just the Packers and Eagles offensive and defensive numbers, it would have produced a final score of 24-25 in favor of Philly. I predicted the final yards to be 372-317 in favor of GB but the Packers missed on a key fourth and goal at the end of the first half, which would have forced the action and had us on our way. That's why they call it gambling and these types of things can happen. The one reason I didn't think it would be as easy as my first 4% play this year is because the defenses were better but I thought the offenses would perform well enough to overcome that.

Last week I talked about the home teams dominance in the Divisional Round of the playoffs, in terms of SU wins. After last weeks results, the home teams over the last 21 years have won at least two of the four games every year, and only four of those twenty-one years have they only won two, one of which was last week.

Last week also became only the fourth time in the last twenty-one seasons that the home teams have failed to at least break even against the spread. And it was a terrible week for the home teams, going 0-4 against the spread. I had warned you that New England and the Rams were not in good situations but even Philly, who was in a good situation, was in a terrible match-up, fundamentally. Even Kansas City and Philly, who were in great situations, failed to cover the spread. Just goes to show you need to look at these games from a fundamental and technical standpoint.

On to the Conference Championship games and my database for these games goes back to 1970, which was the first year after the NFL and AFL merged, and there is plenty of data to look at for these games. Coming into this year, there have been 66 games played in the CC since 1970. When the line is less than 10 points, the team winning the game is a perfect 54-0-2 ats. Essentially, whoever wins the game straight up also wins the game against the spread. That's especially relevant this week with the lines being so low. However, trying to predict the SU winner isn't always as easy as it may seem. But, it seems a safe bet to ignore the lines and just pick the SU winner.

There is one simple situation, which applies to this week's games. I list that situation as Strategy #26 in my book, *The Unemotional Football Bettor*, where the NFL strategies have gone 77-56-5 57.9% this year. Do a search at google.com for *The Unemotional Football Bettor* if you're looking for some great strategies to add to your NFL arsenal. I list every game played since 1970 with team stats, lines, scores, etc. for each of the 33 years of Conference Championship games.

Again, the strategy is so simple you will be tempted to dismiss it because of its simplicity but that would be a mistake. If, for the sake of discussion, we can accept that the better defense is the team who has allowed the fewest points during the regular season, we note that these teams over the last 33 years (66 games played) are now 46-18-2 71.90% against the spread. That's a sample of 66 games and producing nearly 72% winners. That's good. This same situation went 2-0 last year, including picking Tampa Bay, a team many said had no chance of winning that game. They showed defense wins these games. Over those 33 years, only four years has the better defensive team gone 0-2 against the spread (one other year they went 0-1-1), and 17 years where they have gone 2-0. So, over the last 33 years, five times the better defensive team would have produced a losing day (15.2%), 17 times you would have gone 2-0 (51.5%) and 11 times (33%) you would have broke even (minus the juice). You have a 3-1 advantage of winning over losing by simply playing these teams, which are New England and Philadelphia.

Let's look at some specific examples of this defensive situation. Over each of those four 0-2 seasons, at least one team was an underdog. There have been ten years where both teams with the better defense were favored in the Championship game. Over those ten seasons, those teams have gone 2-0 for that year six times, gone 1-1 three times and gone 0-1-1 only once. So, of the four seasons where the better defensive team went 0-2, it has never occurred when both teams have been favored. And six times the better defensive teams have both been home favorites. They have gone 2-0 four times, 1-1 once and 0-1-1 once. Home teams as the better defensive team are 29-10-1 while the better defensive road team is 17-8-1. Favorites are 27-8-1 and dogs are 19-10-1. If the favorite has two or more regular season net wins (New England 14 versus 12), they are 17-2 against the spread. My suggestion for this

weekend it to rely on a situation that is simple, makes sense, and in my opinion, gives you the best chance to win money.

Last point on the CC games. Home teams overall are 43-23 SU and 36-28-2 ats over the last 33 years. In only two of the 33 years have the home teams gone 0-2 SU and both of those years saw at least one home dog in those games and in 1997 both teams were home dogs. During the first 21 years of the CC game, the home teams never went 0-2 ats but five of the last 12 years have seen the home team go 0-2 ats. But, remember, the important stat here is the points allowed situation, which I referred to above and those are the numbers to rely on this weekend.

All side opinions went 2-2 last week and are now 139-114-9 55% over the first nineteen weeks of the season.

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

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

Average Points Scored 21.0

Yards Per Rush (YPR) 4.0

Yards Per Pass (YPS) 5.9

Yards Per Play (YPPL) 5.1

NEW ENGLAND –3 Indianapolis 43.5

As mentioned above, New England qualifies in my Conference Championship game situation, which is 46-18-2 and will be the primary reason I am playing this game, but there are other reasons as well. NE also qualifies in the 17-2 subset, which I talked about above. NE didn't look very good in their game against Tennessee last week, averaging just 4.4 yppl, while allowing Tennessee to average 5.2 yppl. Once again, however, NE found a way to win that game, which has been their style all year long.

In their first meeting with Indy this year, the final score was 38-34, but the final total is very misleading for a number of reasons. First, NE only averaged 4.9 yppl and Indy was even worse, at 4.7 yppl. Knowing that the average plays in a NFL game are about 64, two teams who averaged about 4.8 yppl in their first game, should only total about 307 yards each in this game. With that total of yards, this game should see closer to around 40 points for a regular NFL game and about 43 points when using both of these teams offensive and defensive numbers. The point here is the 72 points in the first game was a fluky number. NE won that first game, out averaged Indy 4.9 yppl to 4.7 yppl and lost the turnover battle by -2. I would be very careful of taking Indy, who couldn't win the first game and they won the turnover battle. Yes, I realize Indy was very close to winning that game at the end of the game but the point is they were out averaged from a yards per play standpoint, which could very well happen again this week because they are on the road and Indy won the turnover battle, which isn't likely to happen this week. Brady hasn't thrown an interception at home all year long.

Indy wins their games when they can throw the ball. The most interesting stat from the first game was Indy only averaged 5.4 yps in that game. Other than the NE game, when Indy has averaged under 6.0 yps in their games this year, they haven't scored more than 23 points in a game, have averaged only 20 points per game and have a median of only about 18.5 points per game in the six games they have averaged less than 6.0 yps. Four of those games were on the road and they only averaged 17 points per game in those games. During the regular season, NE allowed just 5.0 yps against teams who were averaging 5.8 yps. Against teams who allowed 0.5 yps less than their opponents were averaging, Indy averaged 22 points per game (again six games) and on the road they averaged 21 points per game (three games) with one of those games being the 38 points they scored at TB. But, I consider that to be more of a fluke seeing TB lost some key people in their secondary in that game. The median for those three road games is just 17 points. The bottom line here is I don't see Indy getting more than 23 points in this game. And, quite frankly, I don't see them getting more than 17 points in this game. Indy has only played two games on the road this year against teams who are above average against both, the run and the pass. They struggled to score 17 points at Buffalo and scored 38 points at TB in that Monday night game but again, injuries, I believe, greatly aided Indy late in that game. Indy gained 301 yards of their 455 yards gained in that game in the fourth quarter. You have to give them credit but they took advantage of a depleted Bucs secondary.

Indianapolis has allowed 21 points per game this year during the regular season. Those numbers don't get it done, on the road, in the Championship game and past history backs that up. Since 1970, 11 teams have taken to the road in their Conference Championship game allowing 20 or more points during the regular season. Those 11 teams have gone just 2-9 ats with most recent losses by Tennessee last year, 24-41 and in 2000 by the Vikings, 0-41. The average score in those games was 27-14. In five of those games, the road team was allowing 21 or more points per game and those five teams went 0-5 ats. In other words, Indy will be bringing the sixth worst defense to ever go on the road in a Conference Championship game. There is one caveat to the Indy defense that deserves to be mentioned and that is they only allow 299 yards per game to teams who averaged 312 yards per game, which would seem to indicate their defense is above average. I think that is important but the most important number is points allowed. Indy, like Philadelphia, is content on allowing teams to rush the ball for five yards a pop, but avoiding allowing teams to gain 20 yards a pass play, figuring the teams will make some mistakes before they drive the length of the field. Unfortunately, for Indy, those teams aren't making enough mistakes and, unlike Philly, they are allowing those teams to score some points.

The 46-18-2 situation, along with the 17-2 subset, past history of defenses this bad failing miserably in this game and the fact Indy allows 4.5 ypr against teams averaging 4.0 ypr isn't good news for Indy. NE is above average throwing the ball, averaging 6.0 yps against 5.8 yps and if Indy tries to stop the run, NE will be able to go over the top. Indy beat a banged up Denver team and then defeated a team who couldn't play defense. Let's remember Indy also didn't force KC to punt the ball and allowed KC to gain 408 yards at 6.8 ypp last week. I would play the under here but I think the number is close to where it should be and the weather appears to be better on Sunday. I strongly believe NE will cover this game and although my research indicates Indy will only score about 17 points in this game, it also seems tough to figure they can be held to only 17 points. If I believe NE covers and Indy may score more than 17 points, then the under doesn't really have a chance and for that reason I will stay away from the under and only lean towards it. **NEW ENGLAND 26 INDIANAPOLIS 17**

PHILADELPHIA -4 Carolina 36.5

This game gets a little tougher to sell Philly on because, from a fundamental standpoint, Carolina looks like they can stay in this game. In some regards, this is the exact same match-up that Carolina saw last week, in a defense that allows you to run on them and a pass defense that is just average. The big difference between the Rams and the Eagles is the Eagles, as we saw last week, don't allow you to score touchdowns once you get inside the 20 yard line. Many will say the Rams also have a better offense, making this game even easier for Carolina. I have been saying this all year long, said it last week as well, and that is the Rams were so overrated this year it wasn't even funny. The Rams offense lived off it's past and the numbers were so misleading, some of which I forgot to point out last week. The Rams passing offense was rated third in the league, in terms of yards per game, but that stat is so misleading it's not even funny. If you throw the ball over 60% of the time, you are going to gain yards in the passing game too. That's what the Rams did. In fact, when looking at yards per pass, there were nine other teams, who were better than them. Carolina passed for 6.3 yps while the Rams were at only 6.2 yps. People will point out the Rams scored 447 points during the regular season, tying for the second most points in the league. That's a farce too. The Rams scored only 42 touchdowns during the regular season (rushing and receiving), which was good for just the sixth best mark in the NFL. The point here is Carolina beat just an average team last week

For Philadelphia, well, they beat what I considered to be the second best team in the league and a team you could argue was the best team in the league from a stats perspective. Now, as we saw last week, stats don't win games, head coaching, etc. also wins games, which is probably why NE has 14 wins and GB only had 10 wins but look at some of these numbers. GB scored 50 touchdowns this year on offense from rushing and receiving (Carolina only scored 28). Those 50 touchdowns were the second best in the league, behind only Kansas City, who had 56 touchdowns. The Packers also allowed only 28 touchdowns from rushing and receiving (Carolina allowed 29). The difference between the two, for the Packers is +22 (50-28), which is by far and away the best number for any team in the playoffs. NE is at just +11, as is Tennessee, while Philadelphia and St. Louis were at +10. Carolina is at -1, scoring 28 touchdowns and allowing 29 touchdowns. Again, the point here is Carolina beat a very average team last week, while Philly certainly struggled, but against a high powered offense and a defense that played well during the course of the season. Carolina, while good and getting better each week, doesn't represent what GB had to offer. GB has a better quarterback, running back, wide receivers and offensive line. The Carolina defense was bet-

ter, from a yards per play perspective, but not from a touchdowns allowed perspective, which makes it pretty close in terms of defense. For Philly, they scored 40 touchdowns this year and allowed 30 touchdowns, which makes their offense better and the defenses about even. Again, it's hard to make a case for a team allowing 4.5 ypr during the regular season. The major points here are the better defense (points per game) has been a solid predictor for the last 33 years and favors Philly in this game. Also, Carolina, while looking good last week, beat an average team, while Philly, who did not look good, was finding a way to beat a very, very good Packer team. That's not just my favoritism towards the Packers because the numbers I just showed you back that up. Unfortunately for GB, they couldn't find a way to win, while Philly did, which is what they always seem to be able to do, just like New England does. Final numbers in this game predict a 4.5 point Philly win (my power ratings) and a seven point Philly win (score predictor). I also think this game has a chance to be higher than "they" think. **PHILADELPHIA 27 CAROLINA 20**

BEST BETS

YTD 58-48-5 +10.20%

3% NEW ENGLAND -3

2% PHILADELPHIA -4

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.

Last week produced a 1-1 week, winning the bigger play, which produced a profit of +0.8%.

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 46-18-2 ats since 1970 in the Championship game. That record is now 47-19-2 since 1970 and in the 34 years of Championship games since the merger, this situation has produced 17 winning years, 5 losing years and 12 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 20-14-3. That's still 59% 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 15-7-3 67%. Advantage New England.

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 opponent's offensive averages. In other words, for this year, NE is allowing 15 points per game (rounded up or down) against teams averaging 19 points per game on offense. The NE defense is allowing four points less per game than their opponents. Carolina is allowing 19 points per game against teams averaging 19 points per game. Carolina is allowing zero points less per game than their opponents are averaging. This would seem to indicate that NE has the better defense. If we can accept that for this research, we would then find the following for SB games played since 1970. There have been 33 SB's played since 1970. The team with the better defense (using the opponents offensive averages as a gauge) is now 17-9-3 ats 65%. There were four years where both team's defenses were tied. The underdogs in those years were 3-1 ats and straight up. One of those ties was NE two year's ago. The SU record in these games is 23-6 79%. Since 1981, the record improves to 13-3-2 81% ATS and an incredible 17-1 94% SU. And, of those 17 straight up winners, we're talking about four dogs. Those dogs were 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, the Denver Broncos over Green Bay in 1997 31-24 as +11.5 point dogs and Tampa Bay last year over Oakland 48-21 as 3.5 point dogs. Overall, dogs are 4-1 ats with all four winners winning straight up. Advantage New England.

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

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

Average Points Scored 21.0
Yards Per Rush (YPR) 4.0
Yards Per Pass (YPS) 5.9
Yards Per Play (YPPL) 5.1

NEW ENGLAND -7 CAROLINA 37.5

Let's first go over the numbers of both of these teams and then we'll talk about the specific match-ups, some myths I have read this week, how I see the game developing and then a few other similar situations, which have taken place over the last 33 Super Bowl's that might be relevant to this game.

NE is averaging 3.4 ypr against teams allowing 4.0 ypr this year for a net of -0.6 ypr. They are averaging 6.0 yps against teams allowing 5.8 yps for a net of +0.2 yps. That translates to 4.8 yppl against teams allowing 4.9 yppl for a net of -0.1 yppl on offense. On defense, NE is allowing 3.5 ypr against teams averaging 4.0 ypr for a net of +0.5 and allowing 5.0 yps against teams averaging 5.8 yps for a net of +0.8 yps. That totals out to allowing 4.4 yppl against teams averaging 5.0 yppl for a net of +0.6 yppl.

For Carolina, they are averaging 4.0 ypr against teams allowing 4.2 ypr for a net of -0.2 ypr. They average 6.3 yps against teams allowing 6.1 yps for a net of +0.2 yps. That totals to 5.1 yppl against teams allowing 5.2 yppl for a

net of -0.1 yppl. On defense, they allow 4.0 ypr against teams averaging 4.1 ypr for a net of $+0.1$ ypr and allow 5.3 yps against teams averaging 5.8 yps for a net of $+0.5$ yps. That totals out to 4.7 yppl against teams averaging 5.0 yppl for a net of $+0.3$ yppl. All of these numbers are for regular season games only.

What we have then is NE averaging 4.8 yppl against 4.9 yppl and Carolina averaging 5.1 yppl against 5.2 yppl. Even though Carolina averages more yards per play, these teams are even on offense because Carolina has played weaker defenses, which have helped them produce better numbers. But, when we compare their numbers to their opponents, we see they are -0.1 yppl below average, just like NE. On defense, NE allows 4.4 yppl against 5.0 yppl and Carolina allows 4.7 yppl against 5.0 yppl. Both teams have played offenses that are equal but NE has produced the better numbers from a yards per play perspective. It's interesting to note both teams throw the ball for $+0.2$ yps better than their opponents defend the pass. But, Carolina runs the ball better, averaging -0.2 ypr worse while NE averages -0.6 yps worse. If both teams throw the ball equally well and Carolina runs the ball better, why are both teams equal when you total up the two offenses? Simply because NE throws the ball about 55% of the time and Carolina throws the ball only about 48% of the time. Therefore, NE accumulates more of their yards through the air because passes average a lot more yards than rushes. During the playoffs, Carolina has run the ball 61% of the time (53% against Dallas – the only good defense they played) and NE has thrown the ball 57% of the time.

Based on these regular season numbers, we could then expect both teams to average about 3.4 ypr. NE could be expected to average about 5.7 yps and Carolina to average about 5.2 yps. For the game, NE would average about 4.7 yppl and Carolina about 4.5 yppl. NE, during the regular season, scored at a higher rate in terms of yards per point than Carolina did. If that continues here, NE would then be favored to win this game by a score of around 23-15. The total yards predicted, based on this, is just about even, but NE (based on the regular season), figures to get in the endzone a little easier than Carolina. During the playoffs, the NE offense has slipped a little, from averaging 14.5 yards per point scored during the regular season to 15.8 in the playoffs. Carolina was at 15.8 during the regular season and is at 15.6 in the playoffs. The biggest difference has been on defense, where Carolina is allowing 24.3 in the playoffs, compared with 15.5 during the regular season. I suspect that is because they aren't turning the ball over in the playoffs, which has allowed their defense to defend longer fields and not allow as many points. NE, who was very good during the regular season, has gotten even better in the playoffs, allowing just 21.1 yards per point scored (they allowed 19.7 during the regular season).

Against specific match-ups similar to these two teams this year, this is how each team has fared. Carolina is going to have to run the ball and NE obviously wants to stop the run. As mentioned, NE is allowing 3.5 ypr against teams averaging 4.0 ypr and is allowing 89 yards per game rushing against teams averaging 112 yards per game rushing. Carolina has played four games against similar competition. Against Dallas they have gained 2.7 ypr on 75 yards and 3.1 ypr on 107 yards. Against Tennessee, they gained 2.6 ypr on 44 yards and against Jacksonville, they gained 4.5 ypr on 122 yards. In all, Carolina gained an average of 87 yards and 3.3 ypr against teams allowing 86 yards and 3.5 ypr. That makes their running game about average to slightly below average against good run defenses. If NE can stop the Carolina rushing game or NE gets a sizeable lead, Carolina will have to throw the ball. NE allows 5.0 yps against 5.8 yps and 204 yards passing per game against teams averaging 195 yards per game. Carolina faced six teams with similar characteristics. In those six games, they averaged 6.9 yards per pass against teams allowing only 5.1 yps. Clearly, they were able to throw the ball against these teams. But, interestingly, if you take out five long passes of the 159 they completed (two of which clearly came on a broken coverage or defenders falling down and allowing long gains), they only averaged 5.5 yps against 5.1 yps. They were still above average but the numbers are much more average. I think they will be able to throw some but not necessarily in obvious passing situations. For NE, they faced six teams who either run the ball well or have a run first mentality. They allowed 3.6 ypr against teams who averaged 4.3 ypr and 107 yards per game to teams who averaged 132 yards per game. NE faced seven teams who are above average throwing the ball and they allowed those teams to average 5.9 yps (those teams averaged 6.7 yps) and 259 yards per game (those teams averaged 230 yards per game). Clearly, Carolina struggles to run against good teams and NE has shut down both, good rushing teams and good passing teams. The jury is still out as to how well Carolina can throw the ball against good pass defenses. For NE on offense, they must be able to throw the ball. They have faced six teams who defend the pass well. In those games, they have averaged 6.2 yps against teams who allow 5.2 yps and 230 yards per game against teams allowing 178 yards per game. Carolina has faced eight teams who throw the ball well. In those eight games, they allowed 6.5 yps against teams averaging 6.5 yps and 257 yards per game against teams averaging 235 yards per game. Clearly, NE can still throw the ball against good pass defenses and Carolina is just average in defending the pass.

As I have perused the net these last two weeks, I have seen different things written that I just don't see happening in this game. Now, these are just my opinions and I could be wrong. I have read things pertaining to comparing this Carolina defense to the Tampa Bay defense of last year. I have to respectfully disagree with this statement. Carolina isn't even the best defense in this game. TB allowed 12 points per game last year and Carolina allowed 19 points per game this year. TB allowed 12 points against teams averaging 22 points per game while Carolina is allowing 19 against 19. TB allowed just 4.2 yppl against 5.1 yppl, while Carolina is allowing 4.7 yppl against 5.0 yppl. During the playoffs, Carolina has allowed 4.5 yppl against 5.1 yppl (NE has allowed 4.5 yppl against 5.6 yppl). So, I don't see any comparison between the two defenses. I have also read that Carolina will be able to run the ball on NE. I suppose this is because people see Carolina averages 4.0 ypr and NE only averages 3.4 ypr so Carolina must be the better rushing team. Well, they are the better rushing team, but when matched up against the opposing defense, these two teams are equal in the running game. Carolina is a BELOW AVERAGE running team. They average 4.0 ypr against teams averaging 4.2 ypr (although 131 yards rushing against teams allowing 121 because of their desire to rush the ball so much). That is not above average, that is below average. Yes, they have run the ball well in the playoffs, but most teams will run the ball well against the Rams and Eagles, who allowed an average of 4.7 ypr this season. Carolina averaged 4.6 ypr against those two teams in the playoffs, which is about average with their season long -0.2 ypr average. I've also seen things written about Carolina playing better on the road than NE. I looked back to each of the last 20 SB's and compared each teams road games and I see nothing that indicates a better performance on the road, which Carolina doesn't even have, leads to winning the SB. Both teams outscored their opponents by about one point on the road during the regular season and Carolina averaged 4.8 yppl on offense and allowed 4.7 yppl on defense, while NE averaged 5.1 yppl on offense and allowed 4.4 yppl on defense. So, actually NE played better on the road, especially when you consider their opponents.

How will this game play out? NE is allowing -0.5 ypr than what their opponents are averaging. Carolina is at -0.2 ypr. That totals -0.7 ypr and when added to the average of all teams in the NFL, which is 4.1 ypr, you get Carolina averaging about 3.4 ypr in this game. NE has been horrible rushing the ball this year, averaging -0.6 ypr, while Carolina has defended the run better than average, allowing -0.1 ypr less. This, again, totals to -0.7 ypr and predicts NE to run the ball for 3.4 ypr, which is equal to Carolina. Now, Carolina would like to run the ball more, so they could end up with more rushing yards because of more attempts, but the averages should be close to equal. During the playoffs, Carolina is averaging 4.2 ypr against 4.3 ypr and NE is allowing 3.6 ypr against 3.5 ypr. NE is averaging 3.5 ypr against 4.2 ypr and Carolina is allowing 4.1 ypr against 4.1 ypr. I think it was rather obvious what NE wanted to achieve against Indy two weeks ago. With Indy's prolific passing attack, they allowed Indy to run the ball more, while trying to take away the Indy passing game. The end result was allowing Indy to rush for 3.9 ypr but only throw for 4.1 yps. NE will approach this game the exact opposite way. Belichick knows he must stop the Carolina rushing game and force Delhomme to beat his team through the air. NE will go all out to stop what Carolina likes to do best. They have done that all year against teams who either rush the ball well or would at least like to rush the ball. I just don't see NE allowing Carolina to run the ball in this game. And, as much respect as I have for Muhammad and Smith, Carolina doesn't have enough weapons at the receiver position to attack NE. A team like Indy has multiple receivers they can throw at you, as does Tennessee, but Carolina only uses two receivers and sometimes three with Ricky Proehl. Those three plus Deshaun Foster represented over 72% of their receptions this year. Carolina has thrown the ball well during the playoffs, but it's much easier to throw the ball when you can run the ball. They have averaged a whopping 8.7 yps in the playoffs against teams allowing 5.3 yps. But, take out the three long passes (70 yards against Dallas when the defender fell down, 57 yards to Muhammad on a long pass and broken coverage, and the 69 yard touchdown pass to Smith to beat the Rams) and they averaged 6.3 yps. More importantly, taking out those two long passes against Dallas (the only good defense they faced) and they averaged just 5.2 yps against a Dallas defense that was allowing 5.0 yps, which brings them right back to their $+0.2$ yps above average for the year. You might say you can't just take out the plays you like but my point would be NE isn't going to give up those plays. They haven't all year long and I don't see it happening here either. NE will throw the ball just like they have all year long. Carolina will be forced to throw the ball, in my opinion, because NE won't allow anything else. If Carolina is able to get a lead or stay within seven points, they will probably continue to try and pound the ball. If NE can jump out to a lead, which I am sure they will desperately try to do, they will be able to force Carolina into something they don't want to do.

NE qualifies in a SB system that is now 22-1-3 against the spread, including a subset, which is 17-0-2. NE has allowed the fewest points in the league this year. Teams in such a spot have now played in 12 SB's, previous to this

year. Those teams are now 10-2 SU, including TB last year. Those teams are 8-2-2 ats. If our leading defensive team has a win percentage of .800 or better, they are 7-0-1 ats and 8-0 SU. NE won 14 games during the regular season, which are two more wins than the next best team. This has happened six times in the history of the SB since the merger in 1970, where one team has dominated the league. Those six teams are now 5-1 SU and 4-1-1 ATS. The lone loss was in 1983 when Washington lost 9-38 to the Raiders. The difference that year was Washington was allowing over 20 points per game. The other five teams allowed less than 17 points per game and went 5-0 SU and 4-0-1 ATS. Those five teams were the 1972 Dolphins (won 14-7), the 1976 Raiders (won 32-14), the 1978 Steelers (won 35-31), the 1985 Bears (won 46-10) and the 1989 49ers (won 55-10). I know, you say all of those teams were dominating those years and NE isn't a dominating team. Tell that to the 1976 Raiders (who scored 350 points during the regular season and allowed 237 points (NE scored 348 and allowed 238). But these teams dominated their playoff games and NE didn't. Tell that to the 1976 Raiders who won 24-21 and 24-7 (NE won 17-14 and 24-14 and dominated the Indy game). Some people will point out this line is just out of whack, but rarely does the line matter in the SB. Out of the 37 SB's played, only three have ended with a team winning but not covering the spread. The likelihood of this game ending up a win for NE but not a cover is low. The average cover by the winning team in the SB is 12.8 points, with a median of 10 points. You better think you're getting at least 10 points of line value to start using the 'value' statement. I've been saying all year that, for me, situations have proven to be more valuable than a perceived wrong line. And, that 22-1-3 (17-0-2 subset) is a much better indicator than what is supposed to be a line of three or four points. If you think NE will win the game SU, and there is plenty of reason based on the numerous situations I have presented here, then there is a good likelihood they will also cover the spread. When I look at the common opponents, I get NE favored by a score of 23-17. When I use yardage, I get NE by a score of 23-15 or 24-15. When I use just road games, I get NE by a score of 21-20. My power ratings show NE by just three points. Again, the situation is a better indicator than the value. The value is clearly split, depending on what you use. The situations greatly favor NE. By the way, for those of you saying Carolina reminds you of the 2001 Patriots, the 22-1-3 situation was on NE that year. Also, NE allowed 17 points per game as did the Rams that year. This year, remember, Carolina is allowing 19 points per game and NE only 15 points per game. That's a big difference. As for the total, it's tough to call. Both teams present below average offenses and above average defenses. That, in and of itself, should make one look to the under. But, Carolina is throwing the ball better, NE likes to throw the ball 55% of the time and it figures that NE will force Carolina to throw the ball more in this game. Lots of passes lead to big plays, clock stoppage and/or turnovers, which can lead to higher scoring games. Against the five teams that can stop the rush, Carolina games have totaled 21, 54, 51, 44 and 39 points. There have been 28 straight SB's, which have totaled 37 or more points, which also makes it tough to take the under. There have been a few that have ended at 37, which is a key number, but knowing that teams get desperate when down, which leads to turnovers and scores, makes it very tough to take the under here. My final points suggest closer to around 38-40 points and favor NE by 6-9 points, before accounting for the 22-1-3 situation they qualify in. I just don't see Carolina being able to score enough points here. NE and Belichick won't stop passing the ball until they have the game well in hand and even then they may have to continue to throw because it isn't likely they will be able to run the ball. If the total would slip to below 37, I may consider going over. Remember, it's just another game and wager number 114 for me this season. Nothing more, nothing less. **NEW ENGLAND 27 CAROLINA 14**

I may come back on Sunday with any props that I like for this game. Also, I have been asked if I handicap basketball. I don't during the regular season but have handicapped the NCAA Tournament for the last eight years. I have developed a totals system that I use, which has won the money in seven out of eight years (some sides too). I am currently working on putting together my college basketball database for the regular season and conference tournaments. That is a huge project but if I get it done before the end of the season, I would start handicapping the conference tournaments (which is my goal). So, look for me definitely by the NCAA Tournament and possibly by the conference tournaments. I've enjoyed sharing information with everybody this past football season and hopefully I've been able to help along the way. I know the information I've read on these boards has helped me.

BEST BETS

YTD 59-49-5 +11.00%

2% NEW ENGLAND -7 (No higher than -7 - I don't normally buy off the 7 but for just one game, I would spend the extra juice and buy this down to 6.5 if you have to. I did it in 1999 for the Rams and it paid off)