

NFL 2008 - Week 8

by Joe Mulder

Week 7: 5-9

Overall: 48-52-2

In my defense, a lot of favorites won their games but failed to cover the spread. Sort of a weird week. Don't worry; we'll bounce back.

The Smartest Thing I Said Last Week:

[You] can say what you want about Pats coach Bill Belichick – for instance, I want to say that he's a philandering sourpuss who sullied his and his team's legacy by blatantly cheating and then clearly lying about it – but the last time his Patriots lost back-to-back games was almost two years ago, and the last time they lost back-to-back games prior to that was in December of 2002. The point being that if something is wrong, Bill Belichick usually fixes it but quick.

[The Patriots beat the first-place Broncos 41-7]

The Dumbest Thing I Said Last Week:

I'll... pick... the... [sorry, I'm having a tough time actually typing the words]... Bengals.

[you just don't pick the Bengals]

Raiders @ RAVENS -7

Baltimore has played very well at home, their only loss coming by three points to undefeated Tennessee. In fact, they'd be tied for a playoff spot if, to describe things in the laziest way possible, the season ended today.

The Raiders still stink; I don't care what they did last week against the Jets. Every team gets a weird win here or there over the course of a season that they shouldn't have gotten; the Raiders won't get two of those in a row.

While we're talking about the Raiders, by the way, we should bring up the issue of calling a timeout the millisecond before the ball is snapped on a last-second field goal try, something that has become quite the little fad in the NFL these days despite the indisputable fact that it hurts your team's chances to win. What we're seeing is this: a team lines up for a last-second field goal that will either tie or win the game (which sort of goes without saying; a last-second field goal that would do neither of those things would really be pointless to attempt). The ball is snapped and kicked, the field goal made or missed, but wait! The opposing team's coach stood next to the referee, hovering next to him like a creepy guy on the subway, and called for a timeout just

before the ball was snapped (one assumes he figured the opponents would snap the ball just as the play clock ticked down to zero, and timed his timeout call appropriately).

The play was whistled dead, but not in time to prevent the kicking team from snapping and kicking the ball. So, now they've got to do it again.

It doesn't take a great deal of mental gymnastics to figure out why this is a bad idea, other than the fact that it's a useless and supremely annoying tactic. Let's imagine that the kicker makes his first kick, which, if you called your timeout, doesn't count. Now he's thinking to himself, "well, there you go. I can make that, no problem. All I've got to do is do it again."

Now, let's imagine the kicker misses his first kick, and your timeout means he gets to kick again. Well, then he'd be thinking, "thank God that wasn't the real kick, or we would have lost! Plus, now I know what I did wrong. I can't *wait* to kick it again, for real this time!"

The point is, what exactly is to be gained from doing this?

In each of the last two weeks this tactic has resulted in what amounted to a second chance for a team to kick a tying field goal that they basically missed the first time, and in both instances that team promptly converted its gift-wrapped second chance. As proof that God has no interest whatsoever in the outcomes of NFL games, the teams that called the Douchebag Timeout (as I insist that it be called from now on) and handed their opponents an extra chance to tie the game – those two teams being the Raiders and the Cardinals – went on to win in overtime.

Sometime soon, though, hopefully in a critical game, some coach is going to use this tactic and end up negating a missed field goal that would have won his team the game, and then his team is going to go on to lose. And then maybe public opinion may, for all intents and purposes, ban this ridiculous tactic if the NFL won't get off its collective ass and do something about it.

Cardinals @ PANTHERS -4.5

The Panthers are gangbusters at home, even against good teams, a group that we are now probably forced to admit includes the Cardinals.

Not much else to say about this game, but, as I was watching the highlights of the Panthers-Saints game from last Sunday, it finally hit me: the Panthers uniforms – which have never looked good but which I don't complain about a lot because thanks to the Broncos, Titans, Bills and Vikings we've got much, much bigger fish to fry in that department – are officially the most dated looking uniforms in sports. Everything about them screams early-to-mid '90s, and that's just not the look you want for your sports team. Not since the

Cincinnati Reds finally abandoned their Big Red Machine-era pullovers has a team so needed to make a change. Really, take a look this week at the style of lettering they use to paint the word "PANTHERS" in the end zone; I bet if you walked up to 100 random people on the street, at least half of them would be able to correctly guess the exact month in 1994 during which that end zone font was designed and approved (also, Zogby would have you believe that like 85 of those 100 people are voting for Obama).

[POW! That's right... political humor! Deal with it, bitches!]

[actually, I apologize to my readers for that. Especially to the female ones. But that's what happens when you watch too much "It's Always Sunny in Philadelphia." That is, if it were possible to watch too much "It's Always Sunny in Philadelphia"]

BUCCANEERS @ Cowboys -2.5

Can we possibly trust the Cowboys at all, at this point in the season? What does it say about your team when the antics of Terrell Owens are like the sixth of seventh worst thing you're dealing with? Half of their secondary, their quarterback, their electrifying rookie running back... all out. The lackluster Rams defense had little trouble with the Cowboys last week; what are the odds that they'll muster up much offense against a superior Buccaneers unit?

Redskins @ LIONS +7.5

Do I dare pick the Redskins to cover a big spread for a third straight week, after they didn't even come close to getting the job done the last two times?

They're playing the Lions... don't I have to?

No. Fool me once, shame on you...

And, as a wise man once sort of meant to say: can't get fooled again.

Bills @ DOLPHINS +1.5

I'm still not sold on the Bills. That win over the Chargers last week may have been due in part to the fact that, as I pointed out in my previous NFL picks column, "the Chargers are a west coast team playing an early game in the east, and the Bills are nice and rested up after their bye week."

Of course, I then went on to pick the Chargers anyway, which was pretty dumb (although not the dumbest thing I said last week; see above).

And I'm not certain if the Ravens provided the league with a blueprint on how to stop Miami's now-slightly-less-vaunted Wildcat Offense, because I'm not certain that "be as good as the Ravens defense" is necessarily a blueprint that can be

followed by everyone.

Sooner or later I might have no choice to admit that these Bills are for real; first let's see how they handle an AFC East foe on the road (lest we forget, they haven't had to do that yet).

Rams @ PATRIOTS -7

The Patriots don't stop the run particularly well, so one might be concerned about another big day from Rams running back Steven Jackson (160 yards and three touchdowns last week against Dallas). Jackson has a strained thigh muscle and missed a couple days of practice this week, though, so odds are he won't be at full strength. And after two big wins, the Rams are bound to fall back to earth soon, seeing as how they stink and all.

The Patriots, meanwhile, with all the trouble they've had, sit there at 4-2, a game behind Buffalo in the AFC East with two shots at the Bills later in the season. If they win a few more games, here, one could be forgiven for suggesting that the Patriots might be in what almost looks, from a certain angle, like the driver's seat.

CHARGERS @ Saints +3 (in London)

As we have seen, I mentioned last week in talking about the Chargers that west coast teams tend to have a little bit of trouble playing on the east coast. Well, this week, the Chargers will be playing on the east coast.. of *England!* So there's that.

Both of these teams are 3-4, so why do I feel like the Chargers are better? Is it because, as I also discussed last week, one of their losses was very fluky and another was completely illegitimate? Maybe. Let's just pick them, then, and be done with it.

Chiefs @ JETS -13

I suppose you have to take the Jets, don't you? Even though they have as many wins over plus-.500 teams as the Chiefs do (one).

Okay, so... look: we all know Brett Favre is so great that Barack Obama, Angelina Jolie and Burt Reynolds from *The Longest Yard* could all have three-way sex, and the messianic super-baby they produced would *still* not be worthy to gaze directly at Brett Favre's awesomeness without having its face melt off like that Nazi who drank from the wrong Holy Grail in *Last Crusade*. No one's trying to say that's not the case.

All I'm saying is that maybe the announcers could ease off on the Favre worship during those points in a game in which Favre a) is in the process of *losing to the Raiders*, and b) just threw what against any other team would probably have been

POOP READING

a game-killing interception less than two minutes ago.

That's all I'm saying.

Okay, let's try and power through these last six...

FALCONS @ Eagles -9

Nine points is too much for an Atlanta team that has shown they can hang with a good team on the road.

BENGALS @ Texans -9.5

I was in Vegas in autumn once years ago, and someone at a blackjack table jokingly asked if I wanted to make a certain move that would have been particularly stupid (I forget exactly what it was). I said, "look, if I wanted to just throw my money away, I'd go and bet on the Bengals."

Well, it turned out that the Bengals were playing Houston, and, since no one goes 0-16, and Houston was a brand-new team, I actually did end up betting on the Bengals. And I won.

So I'll take them for nostalgia's sake.

Browns @ JAGUARS -7

I don't get this line at all. I don't know who in the world would take Cleveland here.

Giants @ STEELERS -3

Clearly the game of the week, a matchup of two 5-1 titans (neither of whom, as luck would have it, are the *actual* Titans, who are in fact 6-0). I still think a person could be slightly worried about the Pittsburgh offense, although that's not much to go on. The Giants have looked very mortal the past couple of weeks, too... I'll just go home team here. Should be a hell of a game.

Seahawks @ 49ERS -5

No one really cares about this game; it will have nothing to do with who makes the playoffs and it's up against the best game of the season so far in Giants-Steelers.

Colts @ TITANS -4

The *actual* Titans keep the winning streak alive on Monday night.
