

NFL 2011 - Week 4

by Joe Mulder

Last week: 8-8

Overall: 20-25-2

But really, I'm 50/50 over the last two weeks. Which isn't that great, but it isn't that bad. Now that it's Week 4 we know everything there is to know about every team in the league, so the rest of the season should be an absolute piece of cake, right?

The Smartest Thing I Said Last Week:

[Against the Giants in Week 2 t]he Rams literally and unambiguously gave up before the game was over, so, I have no problem giving up on them.

Good call. The Rams, who were a popular pick to win their division this year, lost 37-7 at home to Baltimore and fell to 3-0.

The Dumbest Thing I Said Last Week:

You'd have to be crazy to think that the Bills are actually going to *beat* the Patriots on Sunday...

Apparently the Bills themselves were crazy, because they won. They were nine point underdogs and I picked them to cover that spread so I get to count this game in my personal win column, but still.

Onward.

Bills @ BENGALS +3

Whaaaaaat? But Joe, the Bengals are having an impressively Bengal-esque season so far, going nowhere at 1-2. The undefeated Bills, meanwhile, are coming off back-to-back thrilling comeback wins against two teams – the Patriots and Raiders – who have combined to defeat every single one of their non-Bills opponents this year. So how can I pick the Bengals?

Well, first of all, the Bills have been a tiny bit lucky. Patriots QB Tom Brady, who never throws interceptions, threw four of them against Buffalo last week, for instance. So, there's that.

Also, the three teams the Bills have defeated this season all rank in the bottom third in pass defense (the Chiefs are 21st out of 32 teams, by far the highest of any team the Bills have played so far. The Raiders are 28th and the Patriots are dead last). The Bengals, on the other hand, have the fifth-best pass defense in the NFL. It's early, sure, and the Bengals have played the Browns, Broncos and 49ers, not exactly a murderer's row of passing attacks.

Still, I suspect that the Bills are a bit of a mirage so far (good enough to erase deficits of 21-3 and 21-0 in consecutive weeks, but inconsistent enough to fall that far behind in the first place), and the Bengals might be a little tougher than their record suggests. That's a lot of "suspects" and "mights" to be picking against an undefeated team, I realize, but I've got me a hunch about this one, darn it.

TITANS @ Browns -1

Laugh if you must, but this Week 4 Titans/Browns game might actually turn out to have playoff implications down the road. I *know*! Titans/Browns! Who would have thunk it?

[There's also a not tiny chance that any assertion that playoff berths might be affected in the slightest by this game will look ridiculous by Halloween, but for now I'm quite comfy out on that limb]

I'm not sure about the Titans. Since I'll never trust the Houston Texans I'm left with little choice but to assume that the Titans are going to win the AFC South, but I'm still not sure about them. They've looked OK so far even without megastar running back Chris Johnson performing anywhere near expectations, so if he ever gets going maybe they'll really take off. On the other hand their best offensive weapon so far, wide receiver Kenny Britt, was injured last week and is out for the year.

As for the Browns, they're 2-1 but we've got precious little evidence that they're any good. They stunk up the joint against the Bengals in the opener, and then beat two teams (Indy and Miami) that have yet to win a game at all. Seems like the wisest course of action for this particular game is to just assume that the Titans are the playoff-caliber team I sort of randomly decided they were three weeks ago.

STEELERS @ Texans -3.5

Yes, the Steelers' best players on defense are all aging faster than that [Calvin Coolidge-looking guy](#) at the end of *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* who drank from the wrong Holy Grail, and yes their offensive line stinks. Still. The Texans have had, by my conservative count, about 750 "If the Texans win this one we'll know they're for real!" games in the past four years, and I'm pretty sure they've lost all of them. Probably can't hurt to keep picking against them until they beat a decent team in a big game.

LIONS @ Cowboys-1

It's just about impossible to have learned anything from last week's Lions game; they did come back from a giant halftime deficit to narrowly beat the Vikings, but that's what everyone who plays the Vikings does. So who knows?

And I don't like it when the Cowboys are good, because they get a wildly disproportionate share of the coverage. I suffer

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through that all summer with the Yankees and Red Sox; I don't need it during football season too.

What does any of this have to do with this game? Um... well, basically I was just hoping to distract you from the fact that I have no idea what to pick here, and after changing my pick like four times I pretty much just flipped a brain coin to come up with Detroit.

49ERS @ Eagles -9

Come on; really? This line might have made sense if we hadn't actually seen the first three weeks of the season, but we have.

Plus the whole "West Coast team travelling all the way east to play in an early game and throwing off their body clock" think is moot, since I read that the 49ers just stayed put and didn't even go back home after their game in Cincinnati last Sunday.

Panthers @ BEARS -6.5

I think we all had a sort of "Hey, not so fast, these Bears might not be as bad as we assumed" kind of reaction after they beat the Falcons in the season opener, and this line might reflect that. The way they've looked the last two weeks suggests that, as was once so memorably stated, the Bears are who we thought they were!

Still... the Panthers have to settle down at some point, I think. For all the hype about rookie quarterback Cam Newton's sensational start the Panthers are just 1-2, with that win coming over a Jaguars team that isn't going anywhere and was starting a rookie quarterback of their own. This is an early must-win for the Bears if they hope to be any sort of a factor, as three of their next four matchups are eminently lose-able road games. I'm certainly not ready to crowd their ass, but I do think they'll win handily.

REDSKINS @ Rams +1.5

Go against the Rams until they show just one iota of ball sack, and you can't go wrong.

SAINTS @ Jaguars +6.5

I think the Jaguars are just going to keep frustrating us all year. Even now, as I'm picking against them, I don't feel great about picking against them, but the Saints might be one of the best teams in the league so it's not like we've got much of a choice.

VIKINGS @ Chiefs +1.5

No team in NFL history had ever blown two straight double-digit halftime leads to open up a season 0-2. The Vikings did that against the Buccaneers and then, possibly

sensing that their fan base wasn't *quite* destroyed enough to just give up and let them move to Los Angeles, they blew a 20-0 halftime lead to the Lions last week. When you do something three times in a row that nobody else has ever even done twice, that's quite remarkable.

One can't help but wish that the Bills (who, as I mentioned, came back from 21-3 and 21-0 deficits the last two weeks) played the Vikings this year; we could see 50-0 Minnesota halftime lead turn into a 56-53 Buffalo victory.

But alas, we get Vikings/Chiefs. Despite the fact that the Vikings have just barely lost to three teams that are all pretty good, I think you could still be forgiven for arguing that the Vikings and Chiefs are the two worst teams in the league. If FOX would just air a rebroadcast of Super Bowl IV in these teams' home markets I'm not sure anybody would complain.

GIANTS @ Cardinals +1

This was the point spread of the week that I had to triple-check to make sure I had it right. I know that the Giants are pulling people in off the street to play wide receiver, but they've been playing like contenders and they might be a threat this season (especially before their inevitable December collapse).

Whereas the Cardinals spent last week losing to the terrible, terrible Seahawks. The Cardinals stink, and so does this line. Easy money, folks. No danger whatsoever of this prediction looking dumb on Monday morning: the Giants are going to wipe the floor with them. Guaranteed, 100%, no doubt about it.

(So now either I'm right about that, or next week's "The Dumbest Thing I Said Last Week" item will be a really easy one to pick)

Falcons @ SEAHAWKS +4.5

I'll end up regretting this pick. But it's hard to deny that the Seahawks, no matter how bad they are, have a unique home field advantage, and it's even harder to deny that the Falcons haven't exactly looked like the same squad that had the best record in the NFC last year.

BRONCOS @ Packers -12.5

The Broncos aren't going to win this game, but we've got a classic "horrible team vs. really really good team" situation here, where the really really good team is favored by way, way too much. We had two of those last week (Chargers/Chiefs and Steelers/Colts), and both games were frighteningly close. It'll be a while before I'm willing to trust a double-digit line again.

Even so, we should all be mindful of the fact that the Packers could very well win this game by 35 points.

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Patriots @ RAIDERS +4

If I just wandered onto planet Earth four weeks ago and my NFL knowledge was limited exclusively to this season, this would be a relatively easy pick to make. The knowledge that for the last ten years the Patriots have been the best team in the league and the Raiders have been the worst sort of complicates things, but if you ignore that then it's a little easier.

The Raiders just plain might be good, and even when they were bad you never knew when they'd just randomly beat somebody decent out of nowhere.

Although this limb that I'm spending a lot of time on so far this week is starting to get a little bit shaky...

DOLPHINS @ Chargers -7

I feel like I'm picking too many road teams this week. We'll see.

Jets @ RAVENS -3.5

Who the heck knows? This one is Jekyll vs. Hyde, or Hyde vs. Jekyll; either team has proven capable of either dominating or kind of stinking up the joint. Your guess is as good as mine (and even that assertion probably gives me some undue credit).

COLTS @ Buccaneers -10

Not only am I picking a lot of road teams, I'm picking a lot of *terrible* teams. Again, though, those double-digit spreads give me pause. Especially when the favorite is a team like Tampa Bay, that doesn't really score in bunches.

But Week 4 is kind of when people start to think they really know who's good and who's bad, so maybe the point spreads are a little higher than they ought to be. If that turns out to be true, I might actually have a decent week.
