

NFL 2011 - Week 5

by Joe Mulder

Last week: 10-6

Overall: 30-31-2

Woo hoo! Look at that... just one more winning week away from borderline respectability for the year so far!

The Smartest Thing I Said Last Week:

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.

The Bengals upset the previously undefeated Bills, 23-20.

The Dumbest Thing I Said Last Week:

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

That part was technically kind of smart; the dumb part was picking Green Bay not to cover the 12.5-point spread even though I knew (and specifically stated) how good they were. They beat the Broncos by 26.

Onto the Week 5 picks...

SAINTS @ Panthers +6.5

With all the hoopla quite rightly surrounding Panthers rookie Cam Newton, it's easy to forget that the Panthers are 1-3 and that Newton has thrown more interceptions than all but two other quarterbacks. And now the Saints, probably one of the best teams in the NFC, come to town.

This could be real shootout, as both teams feature high-powered offenses as well as defenses that aren't necessarily so adept at stopping high-powered offenses. I wouldn't be surprised to see the Panthers keep it somewhat close, but with the number being 6.5 and all it's just too enticing to assume that the Saints will manage to win by at least a touchdown.

Chiefs @ COLTS -1

The Colts have been getting better. Sure, they're 0-4 without Peyton Manning, but they're probably one of the best 0-4 teams ever (not that that quote will appear on the cover of their 2012 media guide, or anything). They still have most of the high-powered offensive weapons that took them to the Super Bowl two years ago, so no matter how blind a squirrel backup QB Curtis Painter is he's bound to find one of those nuts eventually (much like he did last week in Tampa, hitting

Pierre Garcon on an 87-yard touchdown strike).

The Chiefs barely have one win (when you beat the Vikings it should could for maybe .65 of a victory) and have been decimated by injuries; most of their star players are about as likely to have football fans watch them play again this season as Hank Williams, Jr. is (BOOM! politics). The Colts should be favored by more than 1; they're the superior team and they'll prove it Sunday.

EAGLES @ Bills +2

This is a nice matchup of the fashionable preseason favorite (Philly) against the early bandwagon team (Buffalo), one of whom will be in trouble after losing to the other on Sunday. It's not quite as much of a must-win for Buffalo, because either way they'll still probably be fighting down to the wire with the Jets, Titans, Raiders and/or Texans for a playoff spot.

For all their Miami Heat-esque preseason hype, though, the Eagles could be just about done for if they fall to 1-4 with a tough schedule the rest of the way. So since I've got no feel for quite how good either of these teams are yet (I really think the 1-3 Eagles are better than the 3-1 Bills, is now much of a feel I don't have), I'll just go with the team that's bound to be more desperate.

Seahawks @ GIANTS -9.5

West coast teams playing early games out east are usually pretty bad bets.

Last place west coast teams playing early games out east against really good teams are even worse bets.

9.5 is awfully high but I think you're safe.

BENGALS @ Jaguars -1.5

Yikes; if it weren't for Maurice Jones-Drew's fantasy stats I think you'd be hard pressed to find anybody who's actually planning on playing attention to this one. I see a lot of sports bars across the country relegating this game to that one crappy standard definition TV over by the john that they haven't bothered to replace yet.

Anyway, when you've got a point spread that's less than two they're basically just asking you to pick who's going to win, and I think Cincinnati is. They're better.

TITANS @ Steelers -3

The Titans were projected to be also-rans by almost everybody (except me! Sometimes I know stuff!) and the Steelers were supposed to be contenders like always, but apart from an opening day stumble Tennessee has been impressive while Pittsburgh has struggled. Opposing

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defenses have been blowing by the Steelers offensive line, creeping up on Ben Roethlisberger and assaulting him like he was some drunk bar skank and they were, well, Ben Roethlisberger.

The Texans look good this year so on the face of it there's no shame in losing to them 17-10 on the road, like Pittsburgh did last week. But the Steelers were pretty thoroughly dominated to a degree not reflected in the final score, and I don't know how much they've got left in the tank. Houston's Arian Foster ran through them with relative ease, after all; you didn't used to tear through the Steelers like that, but he racked up 155 rushing yards on their aging defense.

So if the Steelers fail to stop Chris Johnson, Tennessee's "lethal weapon," it might prove that the Pittsburgh defense is finally getting too old for this shit.

(Sorry. It's late; let's just pretend that never happened)

Raiders @ TEXANS -6

That was a big win over Pittsburgh last week, Texans, but it should have been bigger. If you really want to wear the big boy pants, you can't afford not to handle the Raiders on Sunday. Even though Andre Johnson is sidelined with an injury; that shouldn't be any excuse. You know what they say about excuses being like assholes, right? That's right: if you don't pick exactly the right one, you could get in a lot of trouble.

(heh)

Cardinals @ VIKINGS -2.5

The Vikings are like Chris Christie; in both cases I really want them to win, and I'm convinced they'd have a great chance to win if they'd just fucking *run!*

[A lot of the preceding sentence isn't necessarily true but I fell in love with the analogy]

But apparently the Vikings, having just signed the great Adrian Peterson to a huge contract extension, want to try to keep him healthy for the entire length of the deal by never using him in the second half. In four games so far – during three of which the Vikings blew big halftime leads, mind you – Peterson has rushed 47 times for 274 yards in the first half (i.e., while the Vikings build a nice lead) and rushed 34 times for 102 yards in the second half (i.e., while the Vikings try in vain to hold onto that nice lead and sure could use some clock-grinding runs from the best ball carrier on the planet to help that effort along). I don't know if Will Smith comes by at halftime and zaps the Vikings coaching staff with one of those memory erasing devices or what, but they seem to forget at that point that the best running back in the world is at their disposal. Sure he's more likely to get banged up; sure you'd love him to stay healthy long enough to justify that

huge contract, but none of that matters much if you've got Adrian Peterson on his team and he's not helping you win games.

So if the Vikings are like Chris Christie, I need head coach Leslie Frazier to be more like Barack Obama: fixated on advancing the cause of the guy from Palestine, no matter what the cost.

[Adrian Peterson is from Palestine, TX. BOOM! politics. Again.]

Plus Donovan McNabb stinks, but that's nothing you wouldn't have learned from reading my Twitter feed or my Facebook page back in August, before the Vikings even officially signed him. I understand that it's not likely to happen for a few more weeks if it even happens at all this season, but I'd love to start seeing quite a bit more of Vikings rookie quarterback Christian Ponder (and not just because he's impossibly dreamy).

Anyway, I've been burned by the Vikings all year (when I pick them they stink up the joint, and when I pick against them they lose but cover the point spread so I'm still wrong) but I'm sticking with them anyway. They stop the run pretty well so on the off chance they can shut down Cardinals wide receiver Larry Fitzgerald they should be able to handle anything else Arizona can throw at them.

BUCCANEERS @ 49ers -2.5

Much like the Titans, I expected the Buccaneers to be good this season when few others did (then again, by the time the season started I had almost convinced myself that Donovan McNabb still had something left in the tank and that Leslie Frazier might be a competent coach, so what do I know?). *Everybody* expected the 49ers to be good, because everybody always does even though they never are.

I was watching the Eagles/49ers game last week and it looked to my admittedly untrained eye like the Eagles fell apart more so than that the 49ers had such a great game. They haven't beaten any other decent teams yet, and they might not ever have to (they're already alone in first place by two whole games in the terrible NFC West; they should coast into the playoffs from here), but they finally are getting kind of good. This is a decent matchup; I'll just fall back on my earlier "pick the team that needs the win more" strategy, since the Buccaneers can ill afford not to keep pace in the NFC South.

Jets @ PATRIOTS -9.5

Last season the Patriots beat the Jets by 42 at home, then lost to them at home in the playoffs. In '09 they beat them by 17 in New England, and in '08 they lost by three (granted that was without Tom Brady). So who knows? They either blow the Jets out or lose to them, nothing in between. It's a crazy

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matchup; the Patriots passing game is deadly... but the Jets pass defense is the league's second best. Mark Sanchez, the Jets third-year quarterback, seems to be regressing instead of improving, looking horrendous last week against Baltimore... but the Patriots pass defense ranks dead last. The Patriots are mediocre against the run... but the Jets can't run at all. You can generally play it safe and assume that Bill Belichick and his Pats are going to beat up on their rivals during the season when they're at full strength, so let's just go with that.

And let's all hope that Patriots defensive lineman Vince Wilfork intercepts yet another pass; it's always fun to see really fat guys run with the ball. It's the same sort of bizarre thrill you get from watching a position player pitch in a baseball game, except it only happens for a few seconds all of a sudden and then it's over really quick.

CHARGERS @ Broncos +4

Stick a fork in the Broncos.

If Tim Tebow isn't starting by Halloween you're going to see "Occupy Wall Street"-style protests outside the stadium in Denver, by the way.

PACKERS @ Falcons +5.5

So, the Packers went to Atlanta in the playoffs last year and beat the Falcons 48-21. The Packers are better now than they were then, and the Falcons are probably a little bit worse.

I don't want to get too cocky and be all "free money, woo-HOO!" here, but... free money, woo-HOO!

BEARS @ Lions -5

Going against the grain on this one. Last week the Bills were all the rage after having overcome two huge deficits in a row to remain undefeated, and I correctly picked against them. Well, this week, guess who's all the rage after having overcome two huge deficits in a row to remain undefeated? I'll give you a hint: it rhymes with Detroit Shmions.
