

NFL 2009 - Week 1

by Joe Mulder

Football! Woo-hoo!

I say we just dive right in, and see if I can't top last year's 114-136-7 regular-season record. I'd bet on it; it would be almost statistically impossible for me to be any worse.

Titans @ STEELERS -6.5

This will be a Friday column, so in the weeks where there's a Thursday game you'll just have to trust me. And really, if I was going to lie about my pick for the Thursday game, would I lose 85% of them? The Titans beat the spread thanks to the game going into overtime, at which point the Steelers couldn't possibly have covered (the most points you can score in overtime is six).

Also, it's worth mentioning that we once again saw an overtime game in which one team won the toss, marched the ball about 35 yards down the field, and kicked a field goal to win without the other team getting a shot on offense. Really, NFL, your sudden death overtime format is not rendered any less ridiculous just because it's been in place for decades. Last year we saw a legitimate Super Bowl contender in Indianapolis knocked out of the playoffs by an 8-8 Chargers team while one of the greatest quarterbacks in league history sat on the sidelines with his thumb up his butt for the entire overtime period, and then last night we saw the highly anticipated Titans at Steelers season opener end on a supremely anti-climactic note.

I implore you, NFL: do something about overtime. Ten years from now, when a sensible system has been enacted (whether it's my own "each team must have an equal number of offensive possessions in overtime before a winner can be declared" solution, or whether it's something else that works almost as well), we'll look back and think "how could we, as football fans, have lived with such stupid overtime rules for so long?" I say, therefore, why wait ten years? Let's change it now!

Each team must have an equal number of offensive possessions in overtime before a winner can be declared. Couldn't be any simpler. It's the way the NFL will be doing things

Dolphins @ FALCONS -4

Allow me to be the 1,675,305th person to write on the internet that this game will go a long way toward determining which team's 2008 playoff season was the bigger fluke. I say it was the Dolphins.

Chiefs @ RAVENS -13

I was going to pick the Chiefs because I figured that the

Ravens, while they were good last year, don't beat teams by a lot. Well, I looked it up, and it turns out that last year the Ravens beat teams by 13 points or more plenty of times.

EAGLES @ Panthers +2.5

For the last five years, the Eagles have been good one year and then bad the next. They were good last year. But that's a meaningless trend that we have no reason to believe will have anything to do with this year.

Besides, I can't imagine how it's going to be for the Panthers, going forward with Jake Delhomme at quarterback after his performance in the playoffs against Arizona last season. It seems that it would be like a couple trying to salvage their marriage after the wife slept with some douchebag who works at the husband's office; even if things are going good, when Jake Delhomme drops back to pass all Carolina fans will be able to see are the five Delhomme interceptions that killed their season in that game against the Cardinals a year ago.

Broncos @ BENGALS -4

Really; everybody else thinks the Broncos are going to be *this* bad, huh? "Underdogs to the Bengals by four" bad?

Maybe they will. I'll pick against them this week, because who am I to argue with everybody else? (I mean, I'm sure I will later in this column, but, still...)

VIKINGS @ Browns +3.5

Lost in all the Brett Favre kerfuffle is the fact that, as it stands right now, the Vikings essentially have three starting quarterbacks on the team. Yes, the other two are Tarvaris Jackson and Sage Rosenfels, but, I mean, look at the Packers and Bears in the Vikings' own division, for instance; if Aaron Rodgers or Jay Cutler can't go, you're left with the likes of Matt Flynn or Caleb Hanie. Now, I've never been the biggest Tarvaris Jackson supporter, and I'll never be able to trust Sage Rosenfels completely after the disaster of a fourth quarter he played against the Colts last season but, if forced at gunpoint to make a choice, I'd probably pick either of them over Matt Flynn or Caleb Hanie.

Minnesota Vikings Fans: Talking Ourselves Into Brett Favre Since August '09!

Jets @ TEXANS -4.5

The Texans are this year's trendy pick to make the ascension from "average" to "playoff force to be reckoned with," which would normally mean that they would of course miss the playoffs.

But I think the Cardinals were a trendy pick last year, and they went to the Super Bowl. So you never know.

One thing you do know: you can generally feel okay about taking a good defense (Houston) over a rookie quarterback making his NFL debut on the road (in this case, Mark Sanchez of the Jets).

Jaguars @ COLTS -7

This is the year that the Colts sputter and don't win this division, according to everybody. I think I'm going to wait until they actually play badly for a while before I assume that one of last year's best teams is going to be bad.

Lions @ SAINTS -13

This line is way too high, but as we all know the Lions went winless last season, the first team ever to finish 0-16. Plus, remember what we said about rookie quarterbacks making their NFL debuts on the road (Matthew Stafford of Detroit, in this case)? Granted we said that in regards to the rookie quarterback facing a *good* defense, but, still.

Anyway, let's all assume that I just made my requisite few "how bad the Lions are" jokes and move on, shall we?

COWBOYS @ Buccaneers +6

Here we have two 9-7 teams from last year, both of whom barely missed the playoffs. Apparently it's been decided that they're both going to be bad this year. I say Tampa Bay will, but Dallas won't.

Because do we really think that Cowboys quarterback Tony Romo will be *worse* this year after shedding the twin distractions of Jessica Simpsons and Terrell Owens? Do we? That would be like saying, "I'm not sure Terry will fare any better in this year's marathon than last year's, given that he recently lost 80 pounds and his broken foot finally healed."

Given what Romo's had to deal with over the last couple of years, I think he's performed remarkably well. If I had Jessica Simpson yapping in one year and Terrell Owens in the other I'm not sure I could successfully complete an afternoon of grocery shopping, let alone 63% of my passes like Romo's done the last few seasons.

By the way: am I trying to sell myself on Romo because he's my main fantasy quarterback this year? Well, that's none of your business.

49ERS @ Cardinals -6

I don't think a team can overcome both the Madden cover jinx (the player on the cover of the annual John Madden football video game historically has a much worse year than he did the year before; this year's game features two players, one of whom is Cardinals receiver Larry Fitzgerald, and one of whom I won't mention because his team actually won last night and my whole premise here is how powerful this

"Madden cover jinx" is) and the curse of the Super Bowl loser (something like eight out of the last nine teams that have lost the Super Bowl – like the Cardinals did last season – failed to make the playoffs the next year. The curse is so powerful that even the Patriots, who had gone 16-0 in the regular season en route to losing the Super Bowl in 2007, managed to miss the playoffs last year at 11-5 while the 8-8 Chargers made it in. What's more, the only time the curse didn't work was after Super Bowl XL, when the champion Steelers went on to miss the playoffs the following year while the Super Bowl-losing Seahawks made it back to the postseason. This is widely recognized as indisputable proof that the referees really did screw the Seahawks in the Super Bowl, and since the Steelers were the team that *should* have lost the Super Bowl that year, *they* were actually the ones who fell victim to the curse of the Super Bowl loser. Even though they won).

Basically, all of that is a long and pointless way of saying that I like the 49ers +6.

Redskins @ GIANTS -6.5

The Giants seem to be a relatively safe bet – as safe as such bets get in the unpredictable NFL, anyway – to be the best team in the NFC. I... don't quite trust them, for some reason. Great defense, sure; but don't you need wide receivers? And don't the Giants play in a brutally tough division?

Still, I'll pick them this week anyway, because how can you ever really feel all that good about the Redskins?

Rams @ SEAHAWKS -7.5

The Seahawks should be back. Last year was a lost season, an aberration, an injury-plagued campaign that's best forgotten.

BEARS @ Packers -3.5

This one should be fun. I'm basically picking new Bears quarterback Jay Cutler with this pick, and I'm basically assuming that the Packers' sterling preseason performance meant about as much as sterling preseason performances typically do, which is almost nothing. They were 6-10 last year; they could be much better (probably will), but I'll wait until I see some real games to become convinced of that.

Bills @ PATRIOTS -10.5

In Season 7 of "Buffy the Vampire Slayer," which isn't *quite* as bad as its reputation would suggest, the forces of evil decide "screw it," and send after Buffy and the gang not a particularly bad vampire or demon or monster, but *the origin of earthly evil itself*. And I'm not talking about Satan; no, "The First" (as it is referred to on the show) predates that hack by a good stretch. Yes, the actual concept of evil itself, which had certainly been bad enough before, decides that the

POOP READING

thing to do is to abandon any pretense of restraint and just go after Buffy its very own self.

I couldn't really tell you why that comes to mind when I think about the 2009 New England Patriots. Hm. Just one of those weird things, I guess.

CHARGERS @ Raiders +9.5

The Raiders aren't even the Clippers of the NFL anymore; the Clippers are the Raiders of the NBA.

Meanwhile, the Chargers should really be investigated by the Feds if they go anything less than 5-1 in this crappy division, because really, anything worse than that would be fishy. Heck; 5-1 would be a little fishy itself.

And there we have it... let's see how this one goes, okay? Last year I won roughly 40% of the games I picked, this in an endeavor in which flipping a coin would likely yield about a 50% success rate, so I'm going to assume that things can only get better.
