

**NFL 2011 - Week 13**

by Joe Mulder

Last week: 5-11

Overall: 68-86-6

Well... listen. At least I'm providing a valuable service; anybody who goes to Vegas and bets the exact opposite of all my picks is going to make a lot of money.

All right; let's burn through these. I'm barely more interested in this Friday picks column than you are, at this point. It's all about the fantasy football playoffs at this point; the rest of it is just distraction!

EAGLES @ Seahawks +3

Well, at least I picked the Thursday game wrong. Good start.

Raiders @ DOLPHINS -3 BRONCOS @ Vikings -1

[I'm gonna group a few of these together to save time]

This might sound weird, but I'm kind of glad I'm a Vikings fan instead of a Dolphins fan this season. The Dolphins lost two nail-biters to two tough teams (Giants and Broncos) to fall to 0-7, then won three in a row and could have easily beaten the first-place Cowboys in Dallas on Thanksgiving. So why would I rather be a Vikings fan? Because the Dolphins are actually *good*, and they wasted it by losing their first seven. What fun is it to watch your team if they're good but they're not actually going anywhere?

Meanwhile, we Vikings fans get to watch Christian Ponder learn on the job during a no-stakes season while each loss inches us closer to a better and better draft pick next year. It's win-win, as far as I'm concerned (well, except for the part where the Vikings always lose). And let's be honest, just getting to watch Christian Ponder is a treat on account of him being impossibly dreamy.

Also, since this is an NFL-related column and it's currently late 2011: *Tim Tebow! Tim Tebow!*

TITANS @ Bills -1  
FALCONS @ Texans +3

The dispirited Bills really needed to beat the Jets last week to keep alive any slim playoff chances they might have had. They didn't. The Titans, meanwhile, find themselves in a

division race all of a sudden, only two games behind a Houston Texans outfit forced to rely on their anonymous third-string quarterback, T.J. Yates. Who's T.J. Yates? Exactly. Before kickoff last Sunday, if you'd have polled 100 dudes wearing football jerseys in any given Buffalo Wild Wings and asked them whether T.J. Yates was a real football player or the name of a football player that Keanu Reeves once played in a movie, I guarantee that at least 70 of them would have gone with Keanu.

So with the Texans down and star running back Chris Johnson (who ran for 190 yards last week) perhaps bouncing back for Tennessee, the Titans must smell blood in the water (along with the decomposing stink of what's left of Buffalo's season). I really like the Titans and the Falcons this week. And I know I'm almost 20 games under .500 for the season; but just trust me.

Chiefs @ BEARS -7

I almost picked the Chiefs just because I'm not sure seven points will be scored in this game total (both teams will start backup quarterbacks who make T.J. Yates look like what you'd get if Superman had a kid with Peyton Manning). I still don't feel that great about picking the Bears, to be honest.

JETS @ Redskins +3  
Bengals @ STEELERS -7

Things could change, of course, but as it stands now the Ravens and the Steelers look like they're ready to pull away from the pack, which would leave four teams – the Jets, the Bengals, whomever doesn't win the AFC South (Titans or Texans) and whomever doesn't in the AFC West (Raiders or the Broncos) fighting over the one remaining playoff spot.

The Jets' remaining schedule looks like cake at first glance, with five winnable games left. But they're 6-5; they can probably only afford to lose one more, and even then 10-6 might be tricky (they lost to both the Raiders and the Broncos earlier, so they'd miss the playoffs if tied with either of those teams at the end of the regular season). If they lose to the Redskins they can pretty much forget about the playoffs, but I don't think that'll come up.

The Bengals' impressive, unexpected 6-2 start came with one gigantic caveat: they hadn't played the Steelers or the Ravens yet. Well, they played them three weeks ago and two weeks ago, respectively, and lost both games by a touchdown. If the season ended today Cincinnati would be in the playoffs (I know, right! No matter how long I stare at the current standings, that remains true) but they've got the Steelers on Sunday and Baltimore to close out the season. The crazy thing is that they could lose both of those, thus going 0-4 against the two big boys in their division, and *still* make the playoffs at 10-6.

Since playoff scenarios give me a giant boner, here's how

## POOP READING

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that would work: first, the Jets and Broncos falter, and don't get to 10-6. That's extremely possible; the Jets and Broncos would each have to go 4-1 down the stretch to make it to 10-6. So take the Jets and Broncos out of the equation. The Bengals beat Tennessee earlier in the year and are a game up on them in the standings, to the Titans would have to make up two games with five to play to leapfrog Cincinnati. Not impossible, but no sure thing either. The Bengals have five games left, three of which are against the weakened Texans, the terrible Cardinals and the horrible Rams. So they could lose those Steelers and Ravens games, win the other three, and go to the playoffs in the somewhat likely event that the Jets and Broncos cooperate. And I'm not so sure the Bengals won't steal one of those Pittsburgh or Baltimore games.

Long story short: as weird as it seems that the Bengals would actually make the playoffs if the season ended today, it seems even weirder that with a game each left to play against the Steelers and Ravens their playoff chances *still* look good.

*I know!* The *Bengals*, for heaven's sake.

PANTHERS @ Buccaneers -3

I'm not sure what the record is for the most times two quarterbacks have started against each other in the NFL (a half-assed Google search yielded nothing but frustration and disappointment on that score, as so many such searches do), but I don't think it matters what the record is because Cam Newton and Josh Freeman, who start opposite one another for the first time on Sunday, will eventually destroy it.

COLTS @ Patriots -20.5

Listen: we all know the Patriots are going to destroy the Colts. Probably by way more than 21 points. But I just can't give away more than 20 points in an NFL game. I just can't. It's a matter of principle. So I'll be wrong on this one, but in a much greater sense I'll be right. Righteous, even.

Also, as the Colts inch ever closer to an 0-16 record and the top pick in next year's draft, which almost everybody assumes will be used on Stanford quarterback Andrew Luck, it's worth noting how very awesome it would be to have a quarterback named "Luck" who started his career wearing a horseshoe on his helmet.

RAVENS @ Browns +6.5  
Rams @ 49ERS -13.5

A couple of playoff-bound teams facing lesser division rivals. If I didn't end up picking it wrong every time I declared that betting on a certain game was tantamount to getting free money, I'd declare that betting on these two games was tantamount to getting free money.

COWBOYS @ Cardinals +4.5

The Cowboys are about to go on a roll. And even if they don't, they'll win the NFC East by default.

PACKERS @ Giants +6.5

As has been pointed out plenty this week, the Giants were the last line of defense against the undefeated Patriots five years ago, and they beat them in the Super Bowl. And while they aren't quite the last line of defense against these undefeated Packers, the chances to beat Green Bay are dwindling. I doubt the Giants will be able to play spoilers this week.

Lions @ SAINTS -9

Lions defensive lineman Ndomukong Suh has essentially become a professional wrestling villain now; last week he blatantly stomped on a Green Bay Packers player during the game in front of an arena full of spectators, and then afterwards claimed that he never stomped on anybody. He must be up to something, right? I mean, nobody could actually be like Ndomukong Suh seems to be like. He's up to something.

Chargers @ JAGUARS +3

Pee... and, may I add: You.

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