

NFL 2009, Week 7

by Joe Mulder

Last Week: 6-8

Overall: 49-41

Not great. I feel like we can do better. Yes, "we." I blame you, personally, for not pulling your weight lately.

The Smartest Thing I Said Last Week:

Titans @ PATRIOTS -9

Smart indeed; the Patriots covered this spread, with 50 more points to spare.

The Dumbest Thing I Said Last Week:

Texans @ BENGALS -5

[W]ho are the Texans, to be only five point dogs to a clearly superior team?

Cincinnati's superiority apparently wasn't quite so clear; they lost to the Texans at home, 28-17.

On to this week...

COLTS @ Rams +13

I think we're entering a phase of the season in which there are enough undefeated (or at least very, very strong) teams and enough winless (or at least very, very weak) teams for some of those teams to start playing each other; I'll just call it They Can't Make This Line High Enough territory.

For example: sure, the Rams took Jacksonville to overtime last week, but the Colts are 5-0, are coming off of their bye week, haven't played a close game since mid-September, are built for playing indoors, and shouldn't have too many travel issues road teams normally have, since they only have to head about 250 miles southwest on I-70 to get to St. Louis. In other words, how high would this line have to be before you'd consider taking the Rams? 24? 30? Admit it: you'd have to stop and think about it for a bit before you took the Rams +30, wouldn't you?

PATRIOTS @ Buccaneers +15

Lots of reasons to be wary about this one, which might initially look like a Can't Make This Line High Enough game. But this game is being played at Wembley Stadium in London, where sloppy field conditions and typical London weather have made for two close NFL games in as many years. Back in 2007, the eventual Super Bowl champion Giants beat the Dolphins, who would finish 1-15, by only three points, and last season the Chargers and Saints played a

37-32 game (though a close game might have been expected between those two teams, as both finished the year at 8-8).

I don't feel good about giving away 15 points during what is sure to be a weird week for both teams, but I'm going to stick with the tried and true wagering maxim, "Don't bet against the team that won 59-0 last Sunday."

Vikings @ STEELERS -5

Thanks to last week's collapse, we now know that the Vikings are very beatable (the fact that they won the game on a missed field goal doesn't negate the catastrophic nature of the collapse, since the missed field goal wasn't the result of anything the Vikings actually did). We also know that they can be run on (all you have to do is wait for Jared Allen to try overly hard for a sack and overrun the play, allowing your running back to blow right by him), and we've known for the last several years that they can be thrown on.

And how are the Steelers at running and throwing lately? Well, in his last three games, Pittsburgh QB Ben Roethlisberger is averaging 342 passing yards. "Well, sure," you're saying to yourself, "but that was against the Chargers, Lions and Browns." Okay, but how about this: the Chargers and Browns are both better than the Vikings against the pass this year (the Lions are still a disaster).

And take it from somebody whose fantasy football team is 3-3 instead of 0-6 thanks largely to Rashard Mendenhall: the Steelers have the running game well in hand.

This could be a long afternoon for the Vikings, coming off one tough, lucky win and a couple of relatively easy ones. The Vikings are two games clear of the Packers and Bears in the loss column and don't technically *need* a non-division, non-conference road win over the Steelers, and as we saw during the second half against the Ravens last Sunday, the Vikings are fully capable of playing with no heart whatsoever. I say they go down hard (though of course I'll be thrilled if they don't).

Chargers @ CHIEFS +5

The Chargers season is slipping away, and the Chiefs just might be one of those teams that stinks, but hangs around in every game and steals a win or two out of nowhere once in a while.

PACKERS @ Browns +7

See, with this one, I feel like they *could* have made this line high enough... but they didn't.

49ERS @ Texans -3

Oh, Texans. You tease us, then you disappoint us. You look so great, then you ultimately end up giving us nothing.

POOP READING

The Houston Texans: pro football's hot, standoffish exotic dancer.

Since I have no earthly idea what the Texans are going to do from week to week I'm making my pick based on these two factors: 1) the 49ers, though they got blown out by Atlanta when last we saw them in action, have still only played that one bad game so far this year, and are coming off of their bye week, and 2) the Texans have gone lose, win, lose, win, lose, win, so they're due to lose. That's as reliable a method as I can think of for predicting what in the hell the Texans will do on any given day.

Bills @ PANTHERS -7

I was hoping this line would be lower, like maybe the Bills' victory over the Jets last week tricked people into thinking that they might almost be good, sort of like how the Panthers' horrendous start to the season tricked people into thinking they might be bad. If this line were 3 or 4, I'd consider it easy money.

Still pretty easy, though.

JETS @ Raiders +6

Jets rookie QB Mark Sanchez (or San-CHEZ, as announcer Dick Enberg insisted on repeatedly calling him last week) threw five interceptions last week in a loss to lowly Buffalo. Meanwhile, the Raiders beat an Eagles team that went to the NFC title game last year. And still, I think everybody likes the Jets this week. And everybody is probably right.

What a time to be a Raiders fan, huh?

FALCONS @ Cowboys -4

This is madness. There's no way that the Cowboys should be favored over an undefeated team on the road. Absolute madness.

and...

The Cowboys aren't good, people. Take it from somebody who's been following them because he made the mistake of picking Tony Romo for his fantasy football quarterback: *the Cowboys aren't good.*

Those are the things I've said about the Cowboys the last two times they've played (their bye week was last week), and both times, the Cowboys have failed to cover the spread. They're at home following a bye, and their opponent is coming off a short week thanks to "Monday Night Football," but still. The 2009 Cowboys should not, under any circumstances whatsoever, be favored over a team as good as the Falcons. This is sheer lunacy, and it has to stop.

Wait; no it doesn't. It's a free win for me every week in my picks column. Keep it up, fellas!

Saints @ DOLPHINS +6.5

Other than the fact that the Saints are probably a little better than the Vikings and the Dolphins are probably a little worse than the Steelers, this game parallels the Pittsburgh-Minnesota matchup nicely. You've got an undefeated NFC team that doesn't really *need* a win this week taking on a pretty good AFC squad that does. So, just like before, I'll take the home team.

Bears @ BENGALS -1

I have absolutely no idea, and this weird one-point spread only served to confuse me further. I literally flipped a coin. Although I was mildly relieved when the coin told me to pick the Bengals, for what that's worth.

Cardinals @ GIANTS -7

Well look at this: it's the NFC's last two Super Bowl representatives, going head to head. Not that that means anything beyond the "tidbit" realm. Giants QB Eli Manning has a reputation for struggling in windy weather, but Sunday in East Rutherford, NJ is supposed to be calm and relatively warm, at least for a late October night.. Look for the Giants to bounce back from the whupping they took in New Orleans last week.

Unless I'm wrong about the Cardinals; I don't think they're for real. Recent evidence suggests, however, that I may have made my mind up about them a bit too quickly.

EAGLES @ Redskins +7

Ouch. This "Monday Night Football" pairing probably looked a little better before the Eagles lost to the hapless Raiders (who displayed a bit more hap than usual against Philadelphia last Sunday) and the Redskins lost to the winless Chiefs.

Not that Philly fans probably care; starting Wednesday they've got the World Series to worry about.
