

2018



WILD



EFL

ELITE FOOTBALL LEAGUE

*In our 12<sup>th</sup> season and still going strong!*  
February 3, 2019

2018



CARD



EAST



CENTRAL



WEST



CHINO

34



BRUXELLES

18



BROOKLIN

14



COWTOWN

38

NORTH



COASTAL



SOUTH



**Jimmy Garoppolo**  
**Cowtown Corn Kings**



**G-MAN, DE MAN!**

Cowtown quarterback, **Jimmy Garoppolo** sprints to his left as he looks down field for a receiver in early 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter action at Tillman Field. On this play he would check down to **Mike Evans** in the end zone for a 14-yard TD, giving the Corn Kings a 14-7 lead and starting the ball rolling to a surprisingly lop-sided 38-14 victory. Garoppolo completed his first 11 passes before throwing an interception in the 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter and finished with 273 yards passing and 5 TDs passing.

Across the ocean, the Bombers failed to move on after 4 first half turnovers led to a raft of Chino scores and a 27-3 half time lead for the Convicts. Marcus Mariota could not engineer the miraculous comeback and the Convicts wound up prevailing 34-18.

IN THIS ISSUE: Detailed wrap-ups from the ground in Bruxelles and Cowtown followed by the insights of Spats McChad, who analyzes recently released attendance figures and gives his take on the two wildcard matches. Professor Sterling Smitherman looks back at the playoff match-ups in the 2012 EFL season while Jimmy the Geek looks forward to the Quarter Finals.



*Who was slick  
in Wildcard  
Weekend?*

**"Brylcreem" THE  
EFL'S FIRST SPONSOR**



OFFENCE



**Jimmy Garoppolo**  
**QB**

Cowtown  
Corn Kings

19 of 21, 273 yds, 5 TDs, 1 INT. Near perfect outing allows runaway win.



DEFENCE



**Craig Robertson**  
**LB**

Chino  
Convicts

4 T, 1 FR (70yds-TD), 1 INT (56yds). Scored a TD and took 1 away.



34

Chino



ELITE FOOTBALL LEAGUE

GAME CENTER

2018

Pacific Wildcard



18

Bruxelles

## TEAM LEADERS

Passing	Cmp	Att	Yds	TD
Prescott	11	23	124	2
Rushing	Car	Yds	Avg	TD
Ingram	10	56	5.6	0
Receiving	Rec	Yds	Avg	TD
McCaffery	5	29	5.8	1

## Team

	1	2	3	4	OT	Total
Chino	7	20	7	0	-	34
Bruxelles	3	0	7	8	-	18

## Play of the Game

In the 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter, 3:43 left, Chino leading 10-3, **Trumaine Johnson** forced a **Chris Thompson** fumble and Convicts' LB, **Craig Robertson** returned it 70 yards for the TD that fueled a 20-point 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter.

## TEAM LEADERS

Passing	Cmp	Att	Yds	TD
Mariota	30	58	334	2
Rushing	Car	Yds	Avg	TD
Thompson	9	54	6.0	0
Receiving	Rec	Yds	Avg	TD
Thompson	9	117	13.0	0

## HOME INVASION ROBBERY SPURS CONVICTS!

### CRAIG ROBERTSON SCORES TD AND MAKES KEY PICK TO STEAL WIN ON ROAD!

**SUMMARY:** The Convicts came into Bruxelles looking to steal a game on the road and they did exactly that. The Chino offence got off to a very slow start, managing to gain just one first down over its first four possessions, but prior to their fifth they enjoyed a 17-3 lead thanks to big plays by the defence. The Bombers drew first blood, settling for a 39-yard **Chandler Cantanzaro** field goal after a third down sack by **Brian Orakpo** sack pushed them out of the red zone. But after that initial push the Convicts' defence took over. **Patrick Chung** jumped an outside route and picked off **Marcus Mariota** on the Bombers' second series and returned it 45 yards for a touchdown to grab his team a 7-3 lead. The Bombers responded with a promising drive that started at its own 4-yard line and travelled all the way to the Chino 24. But two plays later, Convicts linebacker **Craig Robertson** snared a tipped pass from Mariota and returned it 56 yards to the Bomber 23-yard line. Three plays later, **Dan Bailey** made it 10-3 with a 39-yard field goal. The Bombers drove back across mid-field to the Chino 41 where they faced 3<sup>rd</sup> & 10. Mariota connected on a slant to running back **Chris Thompson**, but as he reached for the line of gain, Convict cornerback, **Trumaine Johnson** punched the ball out and the linebacker, Robertson picked it up and ran it back 70-yards for a touchdown to make the score 17-3. The Bombers went three-and-out, turning the ball over by punt to the Convicts at their 21. The Chino offence that had done nothing all game struck quickly. Runs of 12 and 11 yards by **Mark Ingram** were followed by a medium fly from **Dak Prescott** that **Marvin Jones Jr** snared and carried for a 56-yard touchdown pass to make it 24-3 with 1:38 left in the 1<sup>st</sup> half. The disaster was not done for Bruxelles. **Ryan Shazier** picked off Mariota two plays later to set up a 55-yard Bailey field goal to give Chino a 27-3 half time lead. Bomber safety **Harrison Smith** picked off Prescott to start the 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter, setting up a 12-yard touchdown pass to **Emmanuel Sanders**. But **Christian McCaffery** nullified that score with a 42-yard run off left tackle and a 17-yard touchdown catch on the next drive to put Chino in front 34-10. The Bombers turned the ball over on downs on 4 straight series trying to come back, while Chino played small ball to run out the clock to victory.

**QUOTES:** "This is what we have doing all year – picking each other up. The offence struggled at the start but the defence picked them up. I wouldn't call it stealing a game, I'd say we took what was ours." – Chino coach, **Rob Nazar**.

"I liked that we moved the ball well but obviously I didn't like all the turnovers. You can't win in the playoffs turning the ball over like that. I'm putting this game behind us and looking forward to the off-season." – Bruxelles coach, **Ken Main**.



HAPPY FAN



titter

ANGRY FAN

**Quentin San Pedro @QSP**

Hurra for Che Robertson! Lockdown Crew rep-up.

**Faart van Wijnendaele** FVW@BrusselsTimes

#mariota was asked to do too much. Like the Vermeylenfonds he could not turn the tide of history, only ride the current downstream.





# Chino 34 Bruxelles 18

	1	2	3	4	F
Chino	7	20	7	0	34
Bruxelles	3	0	7	8	18



\* Playoff \* 02-03-2019 The Fortress Temp:77 Wind: None No Line MVP:Robertson HF

1	10:08	Bruxelles	FG	Catanzaro 39 (10-61-4:41)	0-3
1	7:33	Chino	TD	Chung 45 interception return (Bailey,D)	7-3
2	11:00	Chino	FG	Bailey 39 (4-2-2:09)	10-3
2	3:43	Chino	TD	Robertson 70 yd fumble recovery (Bailey,D)	17-3
2	1:38	Chino	TD	Prescott 56 pass to Jones Jr. (Bailey,D) (3-79-0:55)	24-3
2	0:05	Chino	FG	Bailey 55 (5-18-0:47)	27-3
3	13:49	Bruxelles	TD	Mariota 12 pass to Sanders (Catanzaro) (1-12-0:09)	27-10
3	10:04	Chino	TD	Prescott 17 pass to McCaffrey (Bailey,D) (7-75-3:45)	34-10
4	0:07	Bruxelles	TD	Mariota 7 pass to Kelce (2 - Kelce) (10-64-2:32)	34-18

## Player Stats

Passing	Att	Cmp	Yds	25	In	Td	Sk	Rate
Prescott	23	11	124	1	1	2	1	75.3
	23	11	124	1	1	2	1	75.3

Rushing	Att	Yds	Avg	FD	10	Lg	Td
Ingram	10	56	5.6	3	3	22	0
McCaffrey	4	42	10.5	1	1	42	0
Prescott	4	7	1.8	2	1	11	0
Jones	2	0	0.0	0	0	0	0
	20	105	5.3	6	5	42	0

Receiving	No	Dp	Att	Yds	Avg	FD	25	Lg	Td
McCaffrey	5	0	7	29	5.8	1	0	17	1
Agholor	4	0	9	30	7.5	1	0	10	0
Jones Jr.	1	0	2	56	56.0	1	1	56	1
Ingram	1	0	3	9	9.0	0	0	9	0
Seferian-Jenkins	0	0	1	0	0.0	0	0	0	0
Goodwin	0	0	1	0	0.0	0	0	0	0
	11	0	23	124	11.3	3	1	56	2

Fumbles	No	Rec	Td
Prescott	1	1	0
Jones	1	0	0
Seferian-Jenkins	0	1	0
Marpel	0	1	0
Robertson	0	1	1
	2	4	1

Kick Returns	No	Yds	Avg	Lg	Td
Jones	2	43	21.5	28	0
Goodwin	1	0	0.0	0	0
	3	43	14.3	28	0

Punt Returns	No	Fc	Yds	Avg	Lg	Td
McCaffrey	2	1	7	3.5	4	0
	2	1	7	3.5	4	0

Kicking	FG	Lg	XP	Pts
Bailey	2-2	55	4-4	10

Punting	No	Yds	Avg	Tb	20	Bk	Lg
Way	6	301	50.2	0	2	0	52

Defense	Tkl	Sk	Def	Str	Hur	FF	Int
Jackson,D	8	0	1	0	0	0	0-0
Jackson,J	5	0	2	0	0	0	0-0
Church	5	0	1	0	0	0	0-0
Robertson	4	0	0	0	0	0	1-56
Shazier	4	0	0	1	0	0	1-9
Jarrett	4	0	0	1	2	0	0-0
Johnson	4	0	0	0	0	1	0-0
Orakpo	3	1	1	0	2	0	0-0
Short	3	0	0	0	4	0	0-0
Rankins	3	0	0	1	3	0	0-0
Kindred	3	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Butler	3	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Chung	2	0	2	0	0	0	1-45
McKinley	2	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Brown,J	2	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Ejiofor	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Nickerson	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Moore,T	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Lawler	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Davis	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Smith	0	0	0	0	2	0	0-0
	60	1	7	3	13	1	3-110

Passing	Att	Cmp	Yds	25	In	Td	Sk	Rate
Mariota	58	30	334	2	3	2	1	59.1
	58	30	334	2	3	2	1	59.1

Rushing	Att	Yds	Avg	FD	10	Lg	Td
Thompson	9	54	6.0	2	2	15	0
Mariota	6	24	4.0	1	1	12	0
Johnson	9	21	2.3	3	1	11	0
	24	99	4.1	6	4	15	0

Receiving	No	Dp	Att	Yds	Avg	FD	25	Lg	Td
Thompson	9	0	15	117	13.0	4	1	43	0
Kelce	7	2	17	62	8.9	4	0	17	1
Westbrook	5	0	7	63	12.6	3	1	26	0
Johnson	3	0	4	30	10.0	2	0	20	0
Sanders	2	0	7	24	12.0	2	0	12	1
Godwin	2	0	3	28	14.0	2	0	19	0
Mack	1	0	2	6	6.0	0	0	6	0
Pryor Sr	1	0	1	4	4.0	1	0	4	0
Conley	0	0	2	0	0.0	0	0	0	0
	30	2	58	334	11.1	18	2	43	2

Fumbles	No	Rec	Td
Thompson	1	0	0
	1	0	0

Kick Returns	No	Yds	Avg	Lg	Td
Mack	1	18	18.0	18	0
Hunt	1	7	7.0	7	0
	2	25	12.5	18	0

Punt Returns	No	Fc	Yds	Avg	Lg	Td
Pettis	3	2	26	8.7	10	0
	3	2	26	8.7	10	0

Kicking	FG	Lg	XP	Pts
Catanzaro	1-1	39	1-1	4

Punting	No	Yds	Avg	Tb	20	Bk	Lg
Kern	3	152	50.7	0	0	0	0

Defense	Tkl	Sk	Def	Str	Hur	FF	Int
Burns	5	0	2	0	0	0	0-0
Jones,C	5	0	0	1	0	2	0-0
Davis	5	0	0	0	0	1	0-0
Dupree	4	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Clark	3	0	0	1	1	0	0-0
Smith,H	2	0	1	0	0	0	1-35
Smith,P	2	1	0	0	1	0	0-0
Robinson	2	0	0	2	1	0	0-0
Moreau	2	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Winchester	2	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Gipson	1	0	3	0	0	0	0-0
Wilson	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Bullard	1	0	0	1	0	0	0-0
Watts	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Fuller	0	0	1	0	0	0	0-0
	36	1	7	5	3	3	1-35



# M.V.P.



70-yard FR for a TD and red zone pick and 56-yard return made big impact.

	Chino	Bruxelles
First Downs	10	27
Rushes	21-113	24-99
Passes	11-23-124	30-58-334
Sacked	1-6	1-5
Fumble	2	1
Penalties	6-41	2-15
Turnovers	1	4
Missed Tackles	4	2
Dropped Passes	0	2
Bad Passes	1	5
Passes 25+	1	2
Runs 10+	5	4
Blitzers	17	18
Time	21:08	38:52
Third Down	2-11	7-15
Fourth Down	1-2	0-4
Red Att/Td/Fg	2/1/1	4/2/1
Net Offense	231	428



14

Brooklin



38

Cowtown

## TEAM LEADERS

Passing	Cmp	Att	Yds	TD
Smith	15	29	168	1
Rushing	Car	Yds	Avg	TD
Breida	4	33	8.3	0
Receiving	Rec	Yds	Avg	TD
Engram	7	54	7.7	0

Team	1	2	3	4	OT	Total
Brooklin	7	0	7	0	-	14
Cowtown	7	14	14	3	-	38

## Play of the Game

In the 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter, after taking a holding penalty and a 4-yard loss on a stuff, **Jimmy Garoppolo** completed back-to-back passes, the second one a slant for a 21-yard TD to **Todd Gurley II**.

## TEAM LEADERS

Passing	Cmp	Att	Yds	TD
Garoppolo	19	21	273	5
Rushing	Car	Yds	Avg	TD
Blount	18	99	5.5	0
Receiving	Rec	Yds	Avg	TD
Fitzgerald	10	140	14.0	2

## G-MAN IS DA-MAN!

## JIMMY GAROPPOLO THROWS 5 TD PASSES AS CORN KINGS CRUISE TO VICTORY

**SUMMARY:** It was a near perfect outing for **Jimmy Garoppolo**. The Cowtown QB completed 21 of 23 pass attempts for 273 yards and 5 TDs in a masterful performance that handed his team its first playoff victory since the league's inaugural season in 2007. After being benched in favour of veteran **Joe Flacco** in the season's critical final week, Garoppolo had something to prove and he proved it by directing three consecutive touchdown drives to start the game. Many expected the Hawks' league-leading offence to set the pace, but it was the Corn Kings that dictated the rhythm after their defence forced a three-and-out on Brooklin's opening series. On the home team's first possession, Garoppolo passed to convert three third downs over a 10-play, 76-yard drive that ended when he connected with **Mike Evans** in the back corner of the end zone for a 20-yard TD pass. Brooklin responded with its longest drive of the day, a 9-play, 74-yard surge sparked by a 24-yard **Matt Breida** run that ended with a 16-yard TD pass to **Rob Gronkowski**. Surprisingly, that drive would turn out to be the Hawks' greatest accomplishment on offence. The Corn Kings rushed back, riding a 21-yard short hitch to **Todd Gurley II** and a 29-yard pass to Evans to cover most of a 78-yard drive that climaxed in a 14-yard TD pass to Evans and a 14-7 lead. The Hawks immediately took to the air in response, but **David Irving** hauled down **Alex Smith** 5-yards behind the line of scrimmage to doom the drive to a three-and-out. Cowtown charged back with an 80-yard drive highlighted by a 17-yard run by **LeGarrette Blount** to convert 3<sup>rd</sup> & 4 and a 21-yard slant for a TD on 3<sup>rd</sup> & 10 to Gurley for a 21-7 lead. On Cowtown's opening drive of the 2<sup>nd</sup> half, **Janoris Jenkins** gave the Hawks some life with a 53-yard pick-six off Garoppolo's first incomplete pass of the day. Unfazed, Jimmy G went a perfect 5 for 5 on the next series, finishing off a 69-yard drive with a 3-yard TD pass to **Larry Fitzgerald** to regain their two-score lead. A 12-yard sack of Smith by **Mike Hilton** on 3<sup>rd</sup> & 15 put the Hawks in a hole and the Corn Kings took advantage of good starting field position to pad their lead on a 5-yard TD pass to Fitzgerald. **TJ Watt** intercepted Smith in the end zone early in the 4<sup>th</sup>, robbing the Hawks of their last good scoring opportunity and allowing Cowtown to cruise to victory.

**QUOTES:** "I couldn't have asked for more from the offence or the defence. Everything clicked – Jimmy G looked really comfortable. The defence deserves a lot of credit for holding down that explosive offence. It was a great effort by all." – Cowtown coach, **Jim Coghlin**.

"We got man-handled out there on both sides of the ball. Give them credit, they had a good game plan and they executed. We did not execute very well. It's no secret that we have to get better on defence. We'll be addressing that in the off-season." – Brooklin coach, **Tom Jones**.



ANGRY FAN



titter

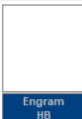
HAPPY FAN



**Bird Man of Brooklin** @BirdMan  
Crash landing in Cowtown.



**Orville Smucker** @Smuckerscoop  
A splendid effort by the Corn Kings. I hardly recognized Joe Flacco. He looked like MVP-Joe out there today.



# Brooklin 14 Cowtown 38

	1	2	3	4	F
Brooklin	7	0	7	0	14
Cowtown	7	14	14	3	38



\* Playoff \* 02-02-2019 Tillman Field Temp:17 Wind:Calm \*Internet\* No Line MVP:Garoppolo HFA:ON(4)

1	6:40	Cowtown	TD	Garoppolo 20 pass to Evans (Bryant,M) (10-76-6:43)	0-7
1	1:16	Brooklin	TD	Smith 16 pass to Gronkowski (Parkey) (9-74-5:16)	7-7
2	13:18	Cowtown	TD	Garoppolo 14 pass to Evans (Bryant,M) (6-78-2:53)	7-14
2	4:58	Cowtown	TD	Garoppolo 21 pass to Gurley II (Bryant,M) (10-80-6:00)	7-21
3	13:56	Brooklin	TD	Jenkins 53 interception return (Parkey)	14-21
3	9:45	Cowtown	TD	Garoppolo 3 pass to Fitzgerald (Bryant,M) (8-69-4:06)	14-28
3	4:01	Cowtown	TD	Garoppolo 5 pass to Fitzgerald (Bryant,M) (7-47-3:53)	14-35
4	3:43	Cowtown	FG	Bryant 23 (11-61-6:51)	14-38

## Player Stats

Passing	Att	Cmp	Yds	25	In	Td	Sk	Rate
Smith,A	29	15	168	1	2	1	3	52.1
	29	15	168	1	2	1	3	52.1

Passing	Att	Cmp	Yds	25	In	Td	Sk	Rate
Garoppolo	21	19	273	1	1	5	0	138.5
Flacco	3	3	32	1	0	0	0	111.1
	24	22	305	2	1	5	0	141.0

Rushing	Att	Yds	Avg	FD	10	Lg	Td
Breida	4	33	8.3	1	1	24	0
Engram	3	17	5.7	1	1	12	0
Smith,I	3	9	3.0	0	0	9	0
Stewart	2	9	4.5	0	0	5	0
Smith,A	4	5	1.3	1	1	10	0
Hopkins	1	0	0.0	0	0	0	0
	17	73	4.3	3	3	24	0

Rushing	Att	Yds	Avg	FD	10	Lg	Td
Blount	18	99	5.5	4	3	17	0
Gurley II	12	53	4.4	2	2	17	0
Washington	7	12	1.7	0	0	7	0
Dayes	1	0	0.0	0	0	0	0
	38	164	4.3	6	5	17	0

Receiving	No	Dp	Att	Yds	Avg	FD	25	Lg	Td
Engram	7	0	7	54	7.7	2	0	17	0
Jeffery	4	0	6	62	15.5	4	1	25	0
Gronkowski	2	0	5	30	15.0	2	0	16	1
Cobb	1	0	4	11	11.0	0	0	11	0
Hopkins	1	0	4	11	11.0	1	0	11	0
Breida	0	2	2	0	0.0	0	0	0	0
Jones,T	0	0	1	0	0.0	0	0	0	0
	15	2	29	168	11.2	9	1	25	1

Receiving	No	Dp	Att	Yds	Avg	FD	25	Lg	Td
Fitzgerald	10	0	10	140	14.0	9	1	27	2
Evans	4	0	5	80	20.0	4	1	29	2
Gurley II	3	0	3	53	17.7	3	0	21	1
Humphries	2	0	2	18	9.0	1	0	13	0
Blount	1	0	1	3	3.0	0	0	3	0
Burton	1	0	1	11	11.0	1	0	11	0
Washington	1	0	2	0	0.0	0	0	0	0
	22	0	24	305	13.9	18	2	29	5

Fumbles	No	Rec	Td
Barner	2	0	0
Stewart	1	0	0
Turner	0	1	0
Whitworth	0	1	0
Engram	0	1	0
	3	3	0

Fumbles	No	Rec	Td
	0	0	0

Kick Returns	No	Yds	Avg	Lg	Td
Barner	5	94	18.8	23	0
Jones,T	1	25	25.0	25	0
Breida	1	13	13.0	13	0
	7	132	18.9	25	0

Kick Returns	No	Yds	Avg	Lg	Td
Johnson,D	2	37	18.5	21	0
Dayes	1	13	13.0	13	0
	3	50	16.7	21	0

Punt Returns	No	Fc	Yds	Avg	Lg	Td
Barner	2	0	6	3.0	4	0
	2	0	6	3.0	4	0

Punt Returns	No	Fc	Yds	Avg	Lg	Td
Humphries	1	3	1	1.0	1	0
Campanaro	0	1	0	0.0	0	0
	1	4	1	1.0	1	0

Kicking	FG	Lg	XP	Pts
Parkey	0-0	0	2-2	2

Kicking	FG	Lg	XP	Pts
Bryant	1-1	23	5-5	8

Punting	No	Yds	Avg	Tb	20	Bk	Lg
Northman	5	210	42.0	0	1	0	44

Punting	No	Yds	Avg	Tb	20	Bk	Lg
Hekker	2	98	49.0	0	0	0	0

Defense	Tkl	Sk	Def	Stf	Hur	FF	Int
Ryan	13	0	0	1	0	0	0-0
Grimes	9	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Tuitt	8	0	0	3	1	0	0-0
Burfict	6	0	1	1	0	0	0-0
McCoy	5	0	0	1	1	0	0-0
Vander Esch	4	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Harrison	3	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Jenkins	2	0	0	0	0	0	1-53
Matthews	2	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Johnson	2	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Jefferson	2	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
McPhee	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Bates III	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Adams,A	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Williams,B	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Adams,M	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Harris	1	0	0	1	0	0	0-0
Apple	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
	63	0	1	7	2	0	1-53

Defense	Tkl	Sk	Def	Stf	Hur	FF	Int
Harrison	6	0	1	1	3	0	0-0
Hilton	4	1	1	0	0	0	0-0
Darby	4	0	2	0	0	0	0-0
Kerrigan	3	1	0	0	0	0	0-0
Smith	3	0	1	1	0	0	0-0
Long	3	0	0	0	0	1	0-0
Addae	3	0	1	0	0	0	0-0
McLeod	3	0	1	0	0	0	0-0
Talib	2	0	1	0	0	0	0-0
Dareus	2	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Colvin	2	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Iving	1	1	0	0	2	0	0-0
Quin	1	0	1	0	0	0	1-0
Mayowa	1	0	0	0	0	1	0-0
Ioannidis	1	0	0	0	0	1	0-0
Watt	1	0	0	0	0	0	1-0
Kpassagnon	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Davis	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Martin	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Coleman	0	0	0	0	1	0	0-0
	43	3	9	2	6	3	2-0



M.V.P.



JIMMY GAROPPOLO  
COWTOWN

273 yards, 5 TD passes, 90.4% comp.  
Cool as a cucumber in the pocket.

	Brooklin	Cowtown
First Downs	13	24
Rushes	17-73	38-164
Passes	15-29-168	22-24-305
Sacked	3-26	0-0
Fumble	3	0
Penalties	7-50	7-64
Turnovers	2	1
Missed Tackles	7	6
Dropped Passes	2	0
Bad Passes	1	1
Passes 25+	1	2
Runs 10+	3	5
Blitzers	3	15
Challenges	0-0	1-1
Time	23:15	36:45
Third Down	5-12	9-13
Fourth Down	1-1	0-1
Red Att/Td/Fg	2/1/0	5/4/1
Net Offense	215	469





# AROUND THE



## With Spats McChad

NEW YORK – It is a mild, clear day in New York City. The air is notably fresh – fresh for Manhattan that is. There is a hint of pause in the habitual business of the average New Yorker. It's February, after all. What of importance happens in February? Yes, I know Valentine's Day is around the corner. I suspect the Masters of Holidays – whoever they are – decided that this month would be the perfect time to invent some excitement, since nothing naturally exciting is likely to occur at the tail end of the seasonal deep freeze.

It was around this time of the year when the NFL played its Super Bowl. Occasionally a New York team would be in one of those and, when that happened, I never stopped to think about the weather, or ponder why Valentine's Day came in early February. I was hyped for the big game. Until the Wrecking Balls start showing me something, that long lost "fan feeling" will remain a distant memory. Not that I don't still enjoy watching football. I find the game fascinating in enough ways that I feel compelled to write about it. But without emotional investment in a team, something is missing.

### ***TICKETS PLEASE...AND THANK YOU***

Football and emotion go hand in hand. Big money knows there is a market for anything that speaks to the heart and soul, therefore football is big business. When the bottom line starts to shrink people in the business start to panic. We, the consumers of football, are already seeing signs of this panic in the form of 'Thank You' advertisements from the league and from certain individual franchises. The prevailing narrative in the media from league officials and owners is suddenly all about "fan experience," "fan entertainment" and the "EFL Family." What is causing this abrupt concern for the welfare of the fans?

The end of the regular season marks the official start of what the league office and owners hope is not an emerging downward trend. Overall attendance at games dropped 1.4% in 2018 from its historical highwater mark in 2017. Perhaps you think that is no big deal. But consider that it is the first drop in year-over-year attendance since the 0.6% dip in 2010 and reverses what had been a steady upward climb of healthy yearly gains beginning with the league's second expansion. Fewer fans are coming to the games, but the experts cannot agree on the cause. Nor can they agree on the significance.

*Deep Fried Data*, a California polling and market research firm, published average EFL attendance figures for all 24 teams since the league's expansion in 2016. They claim these are the real gate numbers, or as they refer to it, "actual bums in seats," as opposed to the typical figures released by teams based on tickets sold. The raw attendance figures indicate that, on average, EFL crowds fill approximately 81% of seating capacity league-wide. The EFL drew 7,975,040 fans to their parks in 2018; 109,776 fewer than last year's attendance record of 8,084,816. *DFD* cautions that the drop is nothing to be concerned about. The NFL experienced similar small drops and rises during its peak years of popularity. But for the EFL – a league that has literally not stopped growing since its inception on 2007 – such a small step back feels like a giant leap off a cliff.

*The Smart People Group*, a research company based in my home State, Connecticut, agrees that attendance fluctuations within a 1.5% range, plus or minus, are normal. They point to the almost unbroken continuous growth in EFL attendance as unusual and only explainable in the context of three major expansions. "The market for football in North America today is smaller than pre-collapse (NFL) for obvious reasons. A lack of trust in the integrity of the product is at the root of the sport losing literally millions of fans over night. But the core fanbase is still very large and the EFL continues to increase its share of that market at the expense of rival pro leagues," explains *Smart People*. They posit that the EFL is heading toward monopoly in less than a decade, eventually overrunning dwindling competition from the Tex-Mex Football League (TMFL) and the Stupendous Football League (SFL), which recently announced it was contracting to two teams and renaming itself the Tiny Football League (TFL). "The EFL should not focus so much on a minor drop in gate attendance this year. It should be aiming to expand into bigger markets and Europe is not one of them," **Vincent Bothwell**, President and Smartest Person of *The Smart People Group*, cautions. "The big city centers in North America are far too underrepresented."

Analysts from *Gliese Ltd*, however, suggest the EFL has reason to be worried about even a slight fall in attendance. Without giving away proprietary data contained within the company's confidential analysis prepared for the league, a spokesman for the firm made the simple observation that "a minor dip in attendance is inconsequential when looked at in isolation, but within the context of static TV ratings and problems with their live-streaming service, the EFL has cause to be worried that its momentum in the market has stalled."

The numbers appear healthy to a lay person's eyes. Average attendance in 2018 stood at 41,536 per game. Although it was down from last year's average of 42,108, that figure is still a 7% increase over the 38,822 that came out in 2016. The average EFL franchise hauls in therefore 332,288 fans per year. What's the league all worried about then?

Clearly, the league's marketing gurus expected a bigger bang for the European buck...er, Euro. While average game day attendance in Bruxelles logged in at 44,715, 7.6% above the league average and 98% of its 45,550 capacity, local ratings rank the EFL below field hockey and swimming in TV viewership. In Budapest, average attendance is down almost 13%, to 29,228 from 33,568 in its first year at Ferenc-Liszt International Airport Stadium. With the North Stars fighting for a playoff spot in the final week of the season, the paltry 23,416 fans it drew for its last home game is a bright red flag. Ranking slightly ahead of rowing and a touch behind table tennis in TV viewership, there are few big money sponsors buying up local ad time for American Football. The North Stars are popular with a highly vocal – some say fanatical – niche market of fans nicknamed the "*Hun-stars*." Their name is a clever piece of word play involving the word "stars" both symbolizing the team and replacing the suffix "sters," which, when pronounced ambiguously, creates a North American English-style colloquialization of the word Hun, or "Hunsters." (Think, "here comes the Hunster, the Hunerama, the Hun Dude!") Yes, remarkably complicated when deconstructed and beyond the capacity of your average Hungarian-speaking Budapest native. It is clearly the work of some American advertising genius attempting to generate a parallel fanbase for Budapest in North America to replace the patently hostile CORESTAR movement made up of disaffected former Markham North Stars fans.

Growing pains in Europe are to be expected to some degree. But there are also signs of trouble in the North American heartland. While franchises in Twin Cities, Chino, Georgia, Iowa City and – believe it or not – Seattle, continue to thrive, with average attendance exceeding the 60,000 mark; the move to Cincinnati failed to generate the anticipated enthusiasm in the Ohio market due to the scandal surrounding the team's ownership. In fact, the birthplace of American Pro Football appears to have turned against the professional version of the sport due to lingering resentment over the collapse of the NFL and the farcical governance of the Crusaders under **Bryan Menefee**. Additionally, small market teams like Scarborough and Erieau are looking even smaller with game day attendance plummeting by 52% and 44% respectively. The Brooklin Hawks are popular, but desperately need a new stadium. Even with 3 straight seasons of sellouts, the 18,650-seat capacity at Optimist Park means the team must rely on TV contract revenue and reserves to meet payroll at a time when big market clubs want to see the salary cap enlarged.

On the bright side, many mid-market clubs with stadiums between 40,000 and 50,000 capacity, that service large, if not necessarily densely populated areas, are doing well. Cowtown, York, Aurora and St. Charles collectively fill almost 97% of the seats on game day. Metropolitan and Greater Toronto Area teams remain strong, despite off-years in Pickering and Durham, while the success of the Wolverines has resulted in 8 straight home sellouts in 2018.

In terms of key markets, the Swordfish are finally starting to win over previously resistant ex-Dragons fans. The results of winning and making a commitment to **Drew Brees** are showing at the gate and exploding TV ratings. New Jersey, if it can ever get its act together, has the potential to capture the New York City market as well as the Jersey Shore; while Buffalo made what most consider a successful entrance into the league with a trio of confirmed sellouts and an overall average attendance of 58,844 fans a game to see a lackluster team. But then again, fans in Western NY are accustomed to mediocrity from their sports franchises. LA is...well...LA – never much of a football town. But when the Knights are the hot, exposure in the South Californian market explodes and, with it, TV ratings and *national* sales of EFL sports paraphernalia.

The above report is not all rosy, but it is far from foretelling the demise or even the contraction of the league. The EFL does not need to spend money on advertisements to thank the fans – especially the ones where Co-Commissioner **Yorrgo Kaldis**, dressed in a black trench coat, sunglasses and a fedora, is taped showing up unannounced at the homes of super fans like '**Iowa Joe**,' bearing an official 'EFL' football and a voucher for *Brylcreem* as a token of appreciation. We don't need to see what Iowa Joe looks like in his underwear.

What the league should do instead is rethink the current playoff format that reserves a precious weekend of football to showcase the four weakest teams in the post-season. Wildcard Weekend was, again, anything but wild as victors rolled over the vanquished with unseemly ease. I've said it before, and I'll say it again: it's bad football. Read on....

### **THE G-MAN**

The quarterback controversy in Cowtown is officially over. At least until the next loss. **Jimmy Garoppolo**, affectionately dubbed '*The G-Man*' by local media because the citizens of Cowtown struggle to pronounce and spell his name, got the nod to start at quarterback over the town's adopted son and former MVP, **Joe Flacco** in the Atlantic Conference Wildcard Game. It turned out to be the right decision. Just about everything went according to Coach **Jim Coghlin's** plan with Garoppolo under center. It is difficult to imagine any quarterback, let alone Flacco, doing a better job under such scrutiny. And although Garoppolo will deny feeling any pressure, there was a real burden that needed to be lifted off the shoulders of both the coach and the franchise this past Sunday.

First, unseating 'Good old Joe' from his permanent starting role was controversial back when it first happened in Week Five against Aurora. Although Garoppolo had looked like the second coming of [*insert your favourite "greatest QB of all time" here*] in that 48-13 whipping of the defending Gale Sayers Champs, the decision to go with him over Joe in the Wildcard Game was no less contentious, coming off a brilliant and winning performance by Flacco in the critical Week 16 win over Durham. Cowtown was, as usual, divided down the traditional feuding line between East Cowtown and West Cowtown when it came to who should start against

Brooklin. The influential Joneses of West Cowtown have always backed **Joe Flacco**; while their despised foes, the Smiths of East Cowtown, traditionally support the back-up quarterback – whoever that may be. The Browns of Downtown Cowtown – the traditional mediators between the Joneses and the Smiths – usually unite behind what is deemed best for the team. But this time they themselves were divided on what was best for the team. **Farmer Brown** and his clan were desperate for a playoff victory, having lost seven straight playoff matches since their lone post-season victory back in 2007 over Iowa City. Some, like Farmer Brown's brother **Zebadiah**, felt that "it's true Joe looks like a bit of a wet sock these days, but he's a winner!" While others, such as Farmer Brown's daughter, **Missy**, opined that Garoppolo should start because "Jimmy's as handsome as a button and a real razzler-dazzler!"

In the end, Farmer Brown left it in the hands of the coach: "It's the right thing to do," he had declared finally at the special meeting of the Rotary Club called to debate the issue. That settled the matter for the leading families of Cowtown, including the Greens of South Cowtown (who tended to support the Joneses) and the neutral Appletons of North Cowtown (who, when they took sides, usually favoured the Smiths). It would be up to Coach Coghlin...and *whatever he decides had better work*, they all agreed.

How difficult a decision it was we will likely never know. Coach Coghlin was tight-lipped all the way up until the Sunday morning of the game when he announced, without explanation, that Garoppolo would be the starter. The result was a rare treat for the Corn King faithful and a bit of a TV ratings downer for the network.

'*The G-Man*' dismantled the flailing Hawks' defence with ruthless precision, completing his first 11 passes for 190 yards and 3 TDs, two of those to **Mike Evans**, the supposed "forgotten man" in the Corn King attack (who still managed to catch 77 passes, 8 for TDs in the regular season). His first miscue, however, was a doozy. Leading 21-7, with possession to start the 2<sup>nd</sup> half, "Mr. Perfect" suffered a classic brain fart that often occurs when success promotes a lapse in concentration. With all the time in the world and an open Evans sprinting up the seam, Garoppolo fired a perfect spiral into the arms of Brooklin corner **Janoris Jenkins**, who took it back all the way, 53-yards untouched, for the touchdown. It an instant, Brooklin was back in it, trailing 21-14.

This turn of events unsettled the home crowd. The Joneses and their ilk began whispering that "they should put in Joe" while the Smiths loudly protested that Jenkins had "bumped" Evans down field. Although they had been mostly bottled up so far, the Brooklin offence had been the best in the league during the regular season. Getting a score from the defence was the ideal spark to get them going. It looked like the game was back on.

The only person who remained unfazed by the mishap was Garoppolo himself. He returned to the field and, with Joe Montana-like calm, filleted the Brooklin secondary with five consecutive completions, the last a 3-yard flare to **Larry Fitzgerald** for a touchdown. **Jimmy Garoppolo** had erased his own error and had done so in style. In momentum terms, it was a point of no return. The Corn Kings went on to dominate on both sides of the ball in finishing off an impressive 38-14 victory. The crowd was jubilant. '*G-MAN! G-MAN! G-MAN!*' they barked with the crudity of farmhands mixed with the elegance of a church choir.

'*The G-Man*' finished with 273 yards and 5 touchdown passes and completed all but 2 of his 21 pass attempts. It was a virtuoso performance that stole the media headlines. It was indeed impressive. But football is a team game and he did not achieve this on his own. Any time a quarterback racks up 38 points and 5 TDs while only attempting 21 passes, there are other answers to the question of "how?" **LeGarrette Blount** and **Todd Gurley** combined for 152 yards on 30 carries and their presence kept what little pass rush the Hawks had at their disposal under wraps. With a secure pocket, finding open receivers – when those receivers are Fitzgerald and Evans – was almost like taking candy from a baby.

But the unsung hero was the Cowtown defence. The unit held the league's most prolific offence to just 7 points and arguably the best wide receiver in the league, **DeAndre Hopkins**, to just a single catch for 11 yards. It was no frivolous gesture that Coach Coghlin gave the guy assigned to cover him, **Aqib Talib**, the game ball in the locker room after the game. Brooklin QB, **Alex Smith**, who rarely throws interceptions, threw two in this game – not because he was reckless, but because he was forced to take risks attempting to salvage the game. The Hawks' 215 yards of total offence was a season low by over 100 yards.

"They beat us up in every facet of the game," Coach **Tom Jones** said matter-of-factly afterwards as owner, **Tom Jones**, the singer, stood in the background looking glum. "There isn't much more to be said. I wish we'd played better but it wasn't our day."

Sometimes, it is as simple as that. The Corn Kings were prepared, confident and, after a 10-year playoff win drought, simply wanted it more. It will be remembered in Cowtown as a classic, but everywhere else as a one-sided, undramatic affair.

### **GUILTY AS CHARGED**

It isn't often a team that is out-gained by almost 200 yards and 17 first downs and holds the ball 17 minutes less than its opponent ends up running away with the game. But that is exactly what the Convicts did when they toppled the Bombers, 34-18 at The Fortress in Bruxelles this weekend. By the 3:43 mark of the 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter, Chino led 17-3 without the offence having contributed a single point to the effort. How is that possible, you ask? Here's how it went down:

After settling for a 39-yard field goal on the game's opening drive, the Bombers forced a Chino three-and-out and almost took the ball away when lineman **Chris Jones** stripped a scrambling **Dak Prescott**. Fortunately for the Convicts, Prescott recovered his own fumble behind the line of scrimmage, setting up what was (he certainly was unaware of at the time) the turning point of the game. The Bombers took possession after the punt looking to extend their lead. But after a quick first down, a confident **Marcus Mariota** locked onto tight end **Travis Kelce** as he broke toward the sideline and fired a ball toward him that Chino safety, **Patrick Chung** picked off and returned 45 yards for a touchdown. It was suddenly 7-3 for the Convicts.



The Bombers got the ball back and tried to recoup the Chino touchdown in as dramatic a fashion as they had given it up. Mariota took a seven-step drop into a secure pocket and heaved the ball deep downfield in the direction of **Dede Westbrook**. Although the oft-injured wide receiver had half a step on corner, **Josh Jackson**, the pass carried about two feet past Westbrook's outstretched arms and bounced on the ground.

"And the ball sails just outside the reach of Westbrook, incomplete," observed CBS play-by-play announcer **Andy Catalonia**. "Looked like they had the right play there, James, he just missed it."

"Yes, Marcus Mariota would like to have that play back, Andy," replied colour commentator **James Loftyone**. "He had the time and his receiver was open, he just miss-timed it. Really, that's symptomatic of this year's season. Mariota has struggled to get the ball to his wide receivers for the most part. But he's got to take those shots downfield, Andy, or the Convicts are going to sit on those routes to Kelce like Patrick Chung did on the pick-six!"

Those observations from the booth more or less summed up an afternoon of frustration for the Bombers' passing game. Whether by design or by necessity, the Bruxelles' QB confined himself, for the most part, to Kelce (17 targets) and running back **Chris Thompson** (15 targets) and looked tentative throwing to his wide receivers. He had moderate success finding Westbrook, hitting him on 5 of 7 targets, including a 26-yard long slant on the game's first series. Otherwise, the speed threats down the sideline were decidedly unthreatening. Even when they did occasionally break free, Mariota was usually not looking their way.

On the second series following the pick-six, the Bombers' offence gained some traction. They moved efficiently up the field, not once needing to convert on third down in covering 72 yards from their own 4 to the Chino 24 before a false start penalty on wide receiver, **Chris Conley** pushed them back to the 29. But on 2<sup>nd</sup> & 12, Mariota tossed a medium pass toward Thompson that linebacker **Craig Robertson** jumped on and intercepted with a full head of steam. He was finally brought down at the Bruxelles' 23-yard line after a 56-yard return. The Convicts were already in field goal range and hardly needed the 2 yards they gained in three plays to capitalize on the leg of **Dan Bailey**, who hit on a 39-yard field goal to make it 10-3 for Chino.

After yet another Chino three-and-out – their third in four possessions – the Bombers drove across mid-field and appeared to have something going when Thompson snared a pass down the middle and turned up field at the Convicts' 31. But corner **Trumaine Johnson** get a bead on him and knocked the ball loose, popping it back to the trailing linebacker, Robertson, who snatched it out of the air and ran it back 70 yards for another defensive touchdown. It was now 17-3 and the Convicts' offence had managed to gain just one first down and 26 net yards to that point.

As the first half drew to a close the Chino offence finally made its mark. Runs of 12 and 11 yards by **Mark Ingram** set up a medium fly to **Marvin Jones Jr** that the speedy receiver turned into a 56-yard TD catch. With 1:43 remaining in the 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter, it was 24-3 for Chino, but they weren't done yet. **Ryan Shazier** picked off Mariota on the first play of the ensuing series, setting up a 55-yard field goal by Bailey to give the Convicts a commanding 27-3 halftime lead.

The Bombers had out-gained the Convicts 197 to 107 and had controlled the flow of play. But four Bruxelles turnovers – 3 interceptions and 1 lost fumble – had turned into 20 Chino points. A rare breakdown in the Bombers' secondary had led to the only offensive TD. The mood in The Fortress was gloomy. Something dramatic needed to happen to let the Bombers back in the game.

The spark needed to fuel a dramatic reversal came on the second play of the opening possession of the second half. With good overage downfield, **Dak Prescott** threw off his back foot toward **Austin Seferian-Jenkins**. The ball was a touch underthrown and lacked velocity. All Pro safety **Harrison Smith** sniffed an opportunity and leaped forward to make the pick, returning it 35 yards to the Chino 12-yard line. On the very next play, Mariota hit **Emmanuel Sanders** in the end zone for a touchdown. With very little to cheer about to that point, Bruxelles fans exploded in pent up passion. A naïve new fanbase, conditioned to success after one brilliant season, still believed in miracles.

But the Convicts were about to introduce the Belgian fans to the harsh realities of American-style professional football. It is very difficult – Aurora and Florida notwithstanding – to repeat post-season success in the age of increasing parity. Ignoring the setback of the opening series pick, Prescott returned to work, hitting **Nelson Agholor** for a 7-yard gain then sneaking the ball for a 1<sup>st</sup> down on 4<sup>th</sup> & inches at their own 35. The Bombers' defence knew it could not afford to let the Convicts score again. It dialed up the aggression and two plays later paid the price for it. With **Bud Dupree** blitzing out of his lane and the linemen overcommitting to the pass rush, **Christian McCaffery** cut through the line and found an empty lane, breaking a tackle in the secondary before being dragged down at the 17-yard line for a 42-yard gain. On the next play, Prescott dumped it off to McCaffery, who was by himself beyond the line of scrimmage. He darted untouched the remaining distance to the end zone for a major.

The Convicts had answered. The Bombers' offence would make no more noise apart from the sound of Mariota banging his head on the wall of the 'Lockdown Crew.' His offence did manage to move the ball; but in need of touchdowns instead of field goals they would inevitably be shutdown on fourth down and come away empty. A meaningless touchdown with 0:07 left in the game created the illusion of competition for the scrolling news feed at the bottom of the TV.

Although the score had been lop-sided, it was impossible not to notice that the Convicts had looked mediocre despite the 16-point win. A defensive **Rob Nazer** tacitly acknowledged this, while fending off negative notions that his team had stolen the game.

"There were a lot of mistakes in this game by both sides," he declared. "Nobody plays a perfect football game. They have a darn good defence so we struggled a bit to get things going. But we have a darn good defence too. We did our job well! So, if you're saying we stole the game, well I agree, we did. Like we should. Heck, we're guilty as charged!"

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#### **PACIFIC CONFERENCE QUARTER FINALS**

##### **CHINO @ ST. CHARLES (line – CONVICTS by 2)**

**INJURIES:** Chino – Quan Bray (OUT); St. Charles – Ahkello Witherspoon (DOUBTFUL).

Vegas appears impressed by the Convicts' lockdown defensive performance against the Bombers and the line has moved westward accordingly. I saw nothing "lockdown" about it. I saw a disconcerted Marcus Mariota deprived of a running game having to take risks and getting jobbed by a wolfish Chino defence that has excelled all year at ambushing opposing quarterbacks at the expense of surrendering yards. If it works, it's a game-changer. If not – as it failed to do in the season's final week against Iowa City – it dooms Dak to play a catch-up style that he and his coach would prefer he didn't have to play. Although not easy to see, there were good reasons why the Chargers finished the no.1 seed. On defence they curtailed opposing air attacks while on offence they maintained ball security. They also played to keep the game close at all costs and this often put them in a winning position in the fourth quarter. Sound fundamentals, adequate talent, and a touch of good fortune got them here, so they need to stay focused and ignore the lights of the national stage. Defence will be the key. They have a talented but underrated pass rush capable of bringing effective blitz pressure from all directions. Prescott must be ready to use his legs to extend plays, something he did well in the regular season, or be prepared to throw the ball away and avoid the pick-hungry Charger secondary led by safety Marcus Williams. Both defences take the ball away and suppress the passing game, while being comparatively soft versus the run. Expect to see a lot of Dion Lewis and Mark Ingram in the early-going as both teams look to wear down the opposing line while protecting their quarterbacks. On paper – and sometimes on the field – the Convicts have the superior offensive arsenal. But it misfired badly last week. Another performance like that one and they will be hitting the driving range before seeing the range at The Big House again. **PICK: ST. CHARLES**

##### **IOWA CITY @ TWIN CITIES (line – TRIUMPH by 5)**

**INJURIES:** Iowa City – None; Twin Cities – Kenny Golladay (OUT), Tyler Eifert (OUT).

The Cubs finished the season sizzling hot, winning their last seven games. Deron Redding would have gladly traveled to Wilhalla Stadium one week early to keep the winning vibe humming. Instead, his team picked up a week of rest that it didn't really need but that their opponent did. The Triumph finished strong as well, winning six of their last seven. But that one loss – in Week 13 to St. Charles – wound up costing them the no.1 seed and forced an early right of passage through the hottest team in the conference. The Cubs were pre-season favourites to represent the Pacific in the Gale Sayers Game and that finish remains a strong possibility. But they haven't often looked like a such a commanding favourite. This is because the passing game has been bogged down in a lingering funk that only began to recede in the final two weeks of the season. Even on its best days, the Cubs' air corps, led by Russell Wilson, never exceeded 235 yards passing. This deficiency was partially offset by their own pass defence rarely giving up more. The Cubs' offence sustained itself with one of the more efficient running attacks in the league, but the lack of explosive qualities in the overall attack meant many tight and slow-moving contests that failed to impress the pundits who look for style points when voting for the power rankings. The Triumph carry similar blemishes to their overall standing but these were almost entirely sustained in the dark middle weeks of the season when Mitch Trubisky and CJ Beathard combined to underwhelm opponents. With Carson Palmer starting under center, Twin Cities were 7-1. With 'Ding' and 'Dong' calling the shots they were 4-4. Obviously, the quarterback is important, but the strength of the Triumph is their defence. Ranked in the top five in all but one of the major categories it looks the part on paper. What it does best is shut down the run – the one thing the Cubs' offence does well. At home, with few to no defensive weaknesses and a questionable Cubs' offence, expect the Triumph to...triumph! **PICK: TWIN CITIES**

## ATLANTIC CONFERENCE QUARTER FINALS

### COWTOWN @ SEBASTIAN (line – SWORDFISH by 4)

**INJURIES:** Cowtown – None; Sebastian – Antonio Callaway (OUT), Odell Beckham Jr. (OUT), Kevin King (OUT), Wendell Smallwood (OUT).

This is one of the more intriguing match-ups of the Quarter Finals because these teams have already faced each other twice and the outcomes were worlds apart. In Round One, the Corn Kings' defence shut down the Swordfish attack, limiting CJ Anderson to 29 yards on 16 carries and holding Drew Brees to under 200 yards, 0 touchdown passes, and picking him off early in the game to set up their second touchdown. The Corn Kings' offence, led by Joe Flacco, was not much better and took a lot of penalties; but it made the most of its opportunities in a 17-7 victory. In Round Two, the Swordfish offence racked up over 400 yards of offence while the defence bent, but did not break against the Jimmy Garoppolo-led Cowtown attack to prevail 27-22 and clinch the North Division in the process. The question now is: Which versions of these teams' offences and defences are we going to see in the playoffs when there is no tomorrow? After slashing through the Brooklin defence in the Wildcard game, there is no question that Garoppolo will start at quarterback for Cowtown despite losing at the Fish Tank in Week 15. Cowtown also enters the game fully healthy for the first time since the opening week of the season. In contrast, the Swordfish, after a week of rest, will be without the speedy Antonio Callaway and star bench player, Odell Beckham Jr. This could factor negatively if they are forced into a shootout. On the other hand, Brees can throw almost anybody open, so it may not matter. The Swordfish finished the season with a paint-by-numbers win over the Blue Eagles. Cowtown looked pretty good demolishing a good Brooklin team.

They appear confident and believe they can win. Expect a close game with a bit of everything, including an upset. **PICK: COWTOWN**

### YORK @ TORONTO (line – WOLVERINES by 4)

**INJURIES:** York – Zach Ertz (PROBABLE), Leon Hall (OUT), Sidney Jones (OUT); Toronto – Mike Gillislee (OUT), Tank Carradine (OUT).

Games don't get any tighter nor much more exciting than the Week Eight match-up where York squeaked by Toronto 27-26. It was one of those games where one mistake could make all the difference. A busted play on 3<sup>rd</sup> & 4, where James Hewitt ended up getting the ball on an end-around instead of Tyreek Hill, may have been that play, as it knocked the Wolverines out of field goal range late in the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter of a one-point game. Fans of both teams can only hope that these overachieving quarter finalists can put on a similar show in the playoffs. The Excaliburs have the better team overall and the better quarterback in theory, but the Wolverines have unquestionably the best pass defence in the league, while the much-maligned Jay Cutler seems to have the magic hand when his team needs it most. Tyreek Hill and Saquon Barkley are flat out good enough to make the ramshackle Toronto offensive line a moot point. But this is the playoffs, a time of year when (Guy Williams of Twin Cities will tell you) Cutler seems to wilt under pressure. The Excaliburs defence, despite some lapses, is solid in the secondary while Von Miller is capable of taking a game over by himself. With the playoffs coming to Toronto for the first time, the crowd will be in it. History shows that when the lights get brightest, Cutler gets the dullest. Expect York to adopt the Toronto game plan and establish the run first and let Tom Brady pick his spots and make enough key plays to pull out a win. **PICK: YORK**



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FROM THE EFL ARCHIVES – There was no wildcard weekend in the 2012 EFL season. Looking back at the top-weighted field that year a wildcard round tacked on to the post-season would have been a colossal waste of time. As it was, the Quarter Final round was shaping up to be academic in the eyes of the pundits.

The 2011 Champion LA Knights were set to visit The Graveyard in Hell, MI to take on the Death Valley Undertakers. The Knights had overcome a rocky first half to finish 10-6 and were considered one of the league's hottest teams. But the Undertakers, at 15-1, were hotter and had been

that way all season. They had handed the Knights their only second half loss, a 42-9 drubbing, just two week earlier. The official line favoured the Undertakers by 5; most expected Death Valley to win by a lot more.

The most intriguing match – and the only one really up for grabs – pitted two 13-3 teams against each other. Although evenly matched on paper, Virden had beaten York twice in the regular season. **Matt Stafford** had a silent record-breaking year with 45 TD passes. Silent, because **Drew Brees** was breaking the same record by a lot more. This would be a tough game but Stafford was predicted to out-duel **Tom Brady**.

Cowtown had snuck into the playoffs with a 9-6-1 record, their Week Five tie against Markham giving them the edge over Gwinnett. They were facing a 14-2 Durham team on the road and nobody gave them a serious chance to win.

Scarborough, at 14-2, was a clear favourite at home over 11-4-1 Markham. But after winning 10 straight to start the season, the Eagles had not been flying so high since. They had lost two and had looked vulnerable in a couple of wins over sub-500 teams. Markham enjoyed an 8-game win streak. A strong minority thought they smelled an upset.