

2010



2010

CHAMPIONSHIP EDITION

February 20th, 2011



THIS IS...

SPARTA!



34

SPARTANS



17

PATRIOTS

Vincent Jackson roars "NEVER SURRENDER" after snaring a Brett Favre pass in the end zone to give the Spartans a 14-0 lead in the 1st Quarter of the EFL Championship. Pickering went on to secure their place in history, beating Charleswood 34-17.



CHAMPIONSHIP GAME



4TH QUARTER FINISH LEAVES NO DOUBT SPARTANS SINK PATS WITH 17 POINTS IN FINAL FRAME



CHARLESWOOD

17



PICKERING

34

**M
V
P**

Chris Johnson – Pickering

"I feel like I should give this award to God, or at least Jesus. If he doesn't want it then maybe his mother, Mary, or somebody close to the family. It's been a dream year. My prayers have been answered."



Sheldon Brown cannot get his hands in between Vincent Jackson and the ball. The league's interception leader found the speedy Spartans wide-out hard to handle. Jackson was Pickering's quick strike weapon, scoring a TD and averaging 24 yards per catch on 5 receptions.

DURHAM – All along there was only one goal in the Pickering Spartans camp. That goal was to win it all. It was an ambitious goal – too ambitious in the eyes of doubters – and the doubters were many. The team that finished 4-12 in 2009 did not look like a contender heading into camp. Better than they had been certainly, but not true contender material.

Sharing a Division with Durham and a Conference with Florida made the chances of emerging from the pile to challenge for the Gale Sayers Trophy appear slim. As the season drew nearer, the Spartans made bold moves to improve themselves, including trading the 9th pick overall for tackle **Dave Stewart** and their 2nd round rookie pick, **Maurkice Pouncey** for veteran **Jeff Saturday**. They caused eyebrows to rise when they moved **Eli Manning** for **Carson Palmer**, only to cut Palmer outright and sign SFL refugee **Brett Favre** – an unknown quantity in the EFL. They scored Asante Samuel for veterans **Matt Birk** and **Kelly Gregg**, shoring up a glaring weakness from the 2009 campaign. They dumped young talent **Mario Manningham** for veteran tight end **Tony Gonzalez**.

The moves continued. Piece by piece they built supports around core players **Chris Johnson**, **Vincent Jackson** and **David Harris** until the team that took the field in Week One against Cowtown looked almost entirely new. While the improvements were duly noted, the talk continued to revolve around Florida and Durham – established heavyweights with track records. True respect for Pickering's off-season changes was slow to take root, but after pushing Florida to overtime in Week Four, the subsequent acquisition of veteran **Jason Taylor**, and with each victory more impressive than the last, the Spartans gradually turned the tide of opinion and made believers out of even the biggest sceptics.

The Can-Am Conference Final victory over daunting Florida was undoubtedly the Pickering franchise's finest hour to that stage in its brief history. It was not just a vindication of their pre-season strategy; it was viewed as the ultimate test of the team's Championship mettle. They passed the test with flying colours and, in the post-game euphoria; it was easy to forget that there remained one more test to pass. With so much having ridden on the outcome against Florida, would there be a letdown in the Big Game?

The Spartans' opponents were certainly no new kids on the block. The Patriots had made the playoffs every season since league inception, losing twice in Conference Finals and making it to the Championship Game in 2007. This year they had mounted their Championship challenge on the strength of a league-leading 46 forced turnovers and the veteran leadership of **Peyton Manning**. After dropping their season opener to Mohave, the Pats had manhandled all comers except for invincible Florida and pugilistic Chino at the inhospitable Big House. The memory of a Week Sixteen hiccup against Kutztown had been wiped away by a Quarter Final thrashing of LA and a Conference Final strangling of Chino. The Pats looked strong heading into the final against a team they had not faced in the regular season. Anything was possible.

1st QUARTER (Pickering 14, Charleswood 0) – As predicted, rain fell on the field at Jurassic Park as the team captains met at mid-field. The weather had been a major topic of pre-game discussion; the consensus being that a wet day favoured the turnover-based defence of the Patriots. But the Pats had coughed up the ball themselves during the season – 31 times to be exact, second worst in the league behind Durham. The cause of the Thunder Lizard's maddening season-long ball insecurity was immediately obvious to the throngs of new visitors to Jurassic Park – the place was wet everywhere. People slipped on their way to their seats. Nobody was happy about it except for one very prominent personality.

"This is real football weather, Phil," colour commentator **Bill Badden** remarked to announcer, **Phil Winterall**. "Wet and muddy – the way it's supposed to be. If only it were cold too. Just above freezing would be perfect – really cold and damp. Then you know, when you got that mud all over you – you know; on your jersey, on your pants, down your pants, on your helmet, your face, in your mouth, inside your eyelids, up your nose, under your fingernails, ground into your skin mixed with a bit of blood...and it's cold, you know – that's when you know you're in a football game!"

"Well, it will be interesting to see how the weather affects these two teams, Bill," replied Phil. "The Patriots play in perfect conditions in their dome and the Spartans are accustomed to chillier, drier conditions. How will they handle this humidity and rainfall? It should be interesting."

The Patriots won the toss and elected to receive the kick. The Spartans elected to defend the north goal. Kick-off specialist, **Josh Scobee** set the ball on the tee, lowered his hand, took 5 steps forward and boomed a high kick down the middle that **Jacoby Jones** fielded at the 2 yard line. He got a block and returned the ball 27 yards to just shy of the 30 yard line. Judging from the volume of cheers as reserve centre **Thomas Gafford** took Jones to the turf, the Spartan faithful were out in force at their neighbour's home field.

The Spartans defence was fired up out of the gate. The Pats managed one penalty-assisted first down before a holding penalty on **Jake Scott** and pressure from Spartans end **Ray Edwards** forced a punt on 4th down and 20 from the Charleswood 35 yard line. **Sav Rocca** connected for a 49 yard kick that Darren Sproles returned 10 yards to the 26. A case of early jitters appeared to get the better of the Spartans on their opening possession. **Vincent Jackson** was flagged for a false start off the first snap and, after **Chris Johnson** swept around the outside of the Pats' line for 13 yards on 1st and 15, a high throw from **Brett Favre** missed its mark to bring up 3rd down and 2. **Justin Smith** was not fooled by an attempted surprise draw and stuffed Johnson for a 3-yard loss to bring on **Chris Kluwe** and the punting unit for Pickering.

A 14-yard punt return by Jones gave Charleswood the ball at their own 36 for their second try on offence. Needing to establish the run, the



Pickering linebacker, Koa Misi wraps up Adrian Peterson as he attempts to cut around the corner. Charleswood's star running back had a tough day in wet conditions at Jurassic Park, gaining just 59 yards on 28 carries for a paltry 2.1 yard average.

Pats sent **Adrian Peterson** first to the right, then to the left, but he managed to gain a total of just 3 yards. Worse, on second down, fullback **Ovie Mughelli** was knocked out of the game, depriving the Pats of an accomplished blocker critical to their success in short yardage situations. After **Peyton Manning's** 3rd down pass was batted up by **Kareem Jackson**, Rocca boomed a 61-yarder into the end zone for a touchback and Pickering took over at their 20.

With early nervousness gone and practised routine taking its place, the Spartans' league-leading offence fell quickly into rhythm with Favre taking control. Catching the Pats flat-footed as they focused on Johnson, Favre fired four straight completions, the last a 29-yard strike to Jackson over the middle to bring the Spartans to the Pats' 23 yard line. Undeterred, Charleswood continued to gun for the Pickering MVP, stopping him for a 2-yard gain. Sensing it was the time for some razzle-dazzle, Coach Kostantakos called **Percy Harvin's** number on the end-around. The speedster got a block from back-up

AFTER THE GAME

"The big difference for me this year was the talent around me. It's a lot harder when you carry the load all by yourself. This year, I got help from Chris and my offensive line. The defence was great too. I achieved what I came here to do, win a Championship. It feels real good, hard to describe...just like you're on top of everything. Vince made a great catch on that second touchdown. That got me pumped. He picked me up. This team is going to keep on winning and I'm letting you know right now I'll be back next year." – **Brett Favre**, Pickering

AFTER THE GAME

"I felt we needed to be aggressive, to not back down from them. Looking back it may have been our downfall because we gave them that shot from our 21 that put them up 14-0 early. But we stuck to it and it got us back in the game actually. Ultimately, Pickering was too strong offensively and we struggled to move the ball, especially on the ground. Losing Ovie in the 1st quarter hurt more than people realize. Hats off to Gus and the Spartans for a fine win." – **Jason Findlay**, Patriots coach.



Brett Favre cannot stop smiling after leading his team to the Gale Sayers Trophy in his first EFL season. "It's my first, but it's not my last," he said to reporters.

lineman **John Jerry** and hugged the sideline the entire 21 yards to the end zone for the opening score of the game. The spectators at Jurassic Park erupted in celebration, leaving little doubt about the prevailing sentiment of the crowd.

A 36-yard return by Jones on the ensuing kickoff was nullified by an illegal block; pushing the Pats back to their 11 yard line. Manning went to the air on 1st down but was flushed from the pocket by Edwards and tackled after a 1-yard gain. A dump-off to **Jason Witten** on 2nd down was good for 7 yards, bringing up 3rd down and 2 at the Pats' 19 yard line. With 3 wide receivers in the game, the Pats tried some trickery with a hand-off to Peterson on 3rd down, but **David Harris** hammered him after a gain of 1 yard to bring up 4th down and 1 at their 20. What the Pats did next was shocking. They kept their offence on the field and lined up in the same formation. With the surprised Spartans looking for the pass, the Pats again ran the ball with Peterson to the same spot. They got the same result as **Randy Starks** stood him up inches short of the line of gain to force a turnover on downs deep in Charleswood territory.

It took one play for the Spartans to make the Pats pay for their gamble. Favre fired high and long to Jackson, who leaped and made a circus catch in the end zone for '6.' **John Kasay** nailed the point after and suddenly the Spartans were ahead by two major scores,

14-0, and 4 minutes still remained in the opening quarter.

It was a bad start for the Patriots and, coming against a team like the Spartans, had the appearance of a fatally bad start. But a competitor like **Peyton Manning** is not to be underestimated. Looking nonplussed, Manning went to work late in the first quarter as if it were the fourth with the game on the line. Not budging in their resolve, amazingly the Pats attempted another 4th down gamble deep in their own end. Facing 4th & 5 at their own 34 yard line, Manning made what can only be described as a brilliant pass into the teeth of the Spartans' defence, connecting with Witten for 6 yards to convert the 4th down. Three plays later, the Pats faced another 4th down at their own 47. Now expecting the unconventional, the Spartans kept their primary defence on the field and, as expected, the Pats went for it. Manning found **Marques Colston** wide open on a short slant and the completion was good for 19 yards. The Pats were defying the odds and, as time expired in the first quarter, they were positioning themselves to reap the benefits.

2nd QUARTER (Pickering 17, Charleswood 7) – The 2nd quarter began inauspiciously for Charleswood with a 13-yard run by Peterson nullified by a holding penalty on **Flozell Adams**. But the potential drive-killing gaffe was soon forgotten as **Ray Edwards** grabbed Peterson's facemask on the next play to give the Pats a first down at the Pickering 24 yard line. Facing a three-man defensive front, the Pats tried to take advantage by running the ball but the Pickering line seemed capable of finding Peterson wherever he went. Fortunately for the Pats, the Manning to Colston connection was working a little better. The two hooked up for a 16-yard completion to the Spartans' 8 yard line then **Kareem Jackson** was flagged for pass interference to put the ball on the Spartans' 2 yard line.

The Charleswood faithful in attendance made their presence heard on the next play as Peterson appeared to score on a 2-yard run off right tackle. But a video challenge by Pickering was upheld and the Pats were forced to try again from the one yard line. Peterson appeared to score on the second try as well, but a second video challenge overturned the call on the field once again. Facing 3rd down and goal at the 1, the Pats sent Peterson straight up the middle only to see Harris stand him up one foot short of the goal line. With less than a yard to the end zone, the Pats rejected any thought of settling for a field goal and kept their offence on the field. This time, they tried a different tactic but the result was the same – Manning threw low to his outlet, **Bernard Berrian** and the Pats turned the ball over on downs at the Pickering one foot line without scoring a point after running 17 plays from scrimmage and covering 71 yards of real estate.

The Spartans faced a long road to the Charleswood end zone but covered over half of the distance before a 3rd down pass from Favre to **Tony Gonzalez** fell incomplete. Kluwe booted a high punt that got behind Jones and rolled dead at the Charleswood 7. Manning took the field and snatched a quick first down on a pair of passes to Witten and Berrian, only to see the offence start to sputter with the first hand off to Peterson, who was stuffed for a 2-yard loss by **Jason Taylor**. After Peterson found a sliver of daylight with a 6-yard run on 2nd down, **Jonathan Joseph** bottled up the outlet man, Colston, on 3rd down; tackling him one-yard short of the 1st first at the 35 yard line The Pats faced another 4th down in their own territory and once again they went for it. The gamble paid off with a 16-yard pass to **Sydney Rice** that looked easy as the Spartans played 5 down linemen and keyed on Peterson. But progress for the Pats offence on the whole was anything but easy. Berrian was forced to make an acrobatic catch to earn 5 yards on the next play then penalty-prone guard, **Jake Scott** was flagged for holding to push Charleswood back onto their own side of mid-field. After regaining the

original line of scrimmage, the Pats got a big play from Berrian, who found an opening in the zone and turned a short pass into a 19-yard gain to convert 3rd down and bring the Pats to the Pickering 30.

With the Pats appearing to abandon the run, the Spartans deployed 6 defensive backs. Manning took advantage by checking down to Witten for 8 yards then bringing his offence to the line without a huddle and sending Peterson on the draw for 4 yards and another 1st down to penetrate the Pickering red zone. A botched exchange between **Matt Birk** and Manning on the next play was saved from disaster when the former Spartan, Birk fell on the loose ball beneath a pile of bodies at the Spartans' 19 yard line. The reprieve seemed to inspire the offence as Berrian managed to sneak behind **Morgan Burnett** and haul-in a pass from Manning for an 18-yard gain to the Pickering one yard line. The Pats had been even closer before and come away with nothing. Down by two scores with less than one minute remaining in the 1st half, they could not afford to come away empty-handed this time. Continuing in the hurry-up offence, Manning hustled to the line and handed the ball off quickly to Peterson, who barrelled through the winded and undermanned Spartans' front line for a TD that needed no video confirmation. Charleswood was finally on the scoreboard after nearly one full half of football, making it a one-score game again at 14-7.

But with 38 seconds remaining, the scoring in the 1st half was not over. The Spartans snuck in a sharp blow before the half when Harvin returned a squib kick-off 12 yards to the Pickering 44 yard line, setting up Favre for a few shots down field. He missed the first two but fired the third one deep to Jackson, who caught it on the fly and might have scored a game-breaking TD but for a desperate tackle by **Marcus Trufant** at the Pats' 20 yard line. With 3 seconds on the clock, Kasay came onto the field and made no mistake from 37 yards away to regain Pickering's two-score advantage as the gun sounded the end of the first half. The Spartans took a 17-7 lead to the locker room and, for many, it looked like the contest was over.

3rd QUARTER (Pickering 17, Charleswood 17) – The quick Spartans field goal that ended the first half might have demoralized a team with a less experienced leader. But **Peyton Manning** knew there was a lot of game left and Pats' coach, **Jason Findlay** had no intention of taking that punch lying down. Given the Pats' 1st half strategy of gambling on virtually every 4th down, their gambit to open the 2nd half should not have come as a surprise. Still, there was shock on the Pickering sideline as **Stephen Gostkowski** nibbled a kick that bounced off the chest of front man **Leroy Harris** and into the arms of Pats' special teamer, **Thaddeus Gibson**. The Pats had the ball and, with it, a chance to atone for their defensive lapse at the end of the 1st half.

Starting at their 40 yard line, the Pats got a quick first down then, following a pattern established in the 1st half, got flagged for holding on their next set of downs to push them back again. Facing 3rd and 18, Manning got good protection from his line and found Rice in single coverage for a 16-yard gain, setting up another 4th down conversion attempt at the Pickering 42. Manning again went to the hot read and found Rice for 6 yards to keep the drive alive. Looking to catch the Spartans off guard, the Pats went back to Peterson on 2nd down and 2 but Taylor sniffed him out and nailed him in the backfield for a one-yard loss. The Pats got that yard back and more on 3rd down when **Jacoby Jones** made a rare catch for 11 yards and a first down to the Pickering 18. But the Pats had exhausted their momentum. The Pickering defensive backs stepped up their coverage and Manning threw off target on 3rd & 9 to bring up 4th down. Instead of tempting fate again, the Pats elected to take the relatively easy points. Gostkowski kicked it clean from 34 yards, narrowing the deficit to 7 points trailing 17-10.

Expecting the boldest gambles from the Pats at this point, the Spartans put their hands team on the field in anticipation of another onside kick. But the Pats kicked it deep and Harvin returned it 24 yards from the goal line to give Pickering their first possession of the second half. It was not a memorable one. Favre misfired on a dump-off intended for **Tony Gonzalez**, then Jackson and Johnson dropped consecutive pass attempts to force a very quick three-and-out. Jones returned Kluge's punt 17 yards to give the Pats good field position at their 48 yard line.

The Spartans defence was starting to show signs of tiring. Peterson finally found some room to move, carrying the ball 3 times for 14 yards and breaking a pass in the flat for 21 yards to the Pickering 17 yard line. One could sense the tide was about to turn in the Patriots favour but a big play from cornerback **Jonathan Joseph** kept that from happening. On the next play, Manning found Colston open over the middle but Joseph was waiting for him as he started to run and nailed him square on the numbers, knocking the ball loose. Harris recovered at the Pickering 8 and the Spartans had dodged a bullet. But there was little time to celebrate the first turnover of the game. The rain that had fallen steadily all day came down harder as the Spartans' offence took the field. **Brett Favre** did not look comfortable and threw wildly on his first pass from scrimmage. On the next play he fumbled the snap and the wet ball bounced into the arms of Patriots' tackle **Ryan Pickett**, who carried it untouched into the end zone for a major score and a stunning turnaround. Suddenly, the game was tied 17-17 and the energy on the field had shifted to the Patriots sideline.

Although there was still plenty of time remaining in the game, the sense at the moment was that the Spartans needed to re-establish their offence or the game could easily slip away from them. The Pats also sensed the importance of this drive. The Charleswood line immediately stepped up, holding Johnson to 3 yards on two carries and forcing a shaky Favre back to the air. With the Pats' corners playing press coverage, **Anquan Boldin** slipped behind them and snagged a throw from Favre that went for 12 yards and a much needed first down. That was all it took to grease the wheels of the Spartans' offensive machine. Johnson gained 8 yards on a draw, but was stuffed for a one-yard loss and injured on the next play to bring up another 3rd down. Favre connected with Sproles in the flat and the speedy scat back dodged his way through traffic for a 6-yard play and another 3rd down conversion. Johnson returned from the sidelines and immediately made his presence felt with a 10-yard run across mid-field to the Patriots' 45 yard line and a 7-yard screen pass reception to the 38 as time expired in the 3rd quarter. The vaunted Spartans were on the move, but would the rain at Jurassic Park come into play once more at a critical moment?

4th QUARTER (Pickering 34, Charleswood 17) – After 3 quarters of back-and-forth street-fighting in the mud the combatants on both sides were dirty, wet and tired. Yet nobody wanted to be on the sidelines. The EFL Championship was building to a climax and all eyes were fixated on the action on the field. That action turned explosive when a bold gamble by the Pats' defence backfired. Facing 3rd down and inches at the Charleswood 23 yard line, the Spartans lined up in a 3 wide receiver set. The Pats brought 6 down linemen onto the field and crowded their linebackers tight behind the line, leaving **Sheldon Brown** and **Ed Reed** as the only backs in coverage. Favre could not believe his luck. He audibled at the line, dropped back 5 steps, and delivered a strike to Harvin on the run. There was no way anyone was going to catch the speedy Harvin with a running start. He blazed the remaining 23 yards to the end zone untouched for the go-ahead TD. The Spartans had answered the Charleswood challenge and wrested back the momentum.

Now it was **Peyton Manning's** turn. He knew there was no need to panic and strode business-like onto the field after Jones had given him

respectable field position with a 26-yard kickoff return to the 37 yard line. He got some timely support from Peterson with rushes of 4 and 12 yards to start the drive. With Pickering deploying 5 and 6 defensive backs on every down, it looked as if Charleswood would turn to pounding the Pickering line with Peterson. But they suddenly switched tack, returning to the passing game with an attempted screen to Peterson that Harris broke up at the last split second. A 5-yard dump-off to Rice brought up 3rd down and a panicked return to the ground game. But Brian Dawkins was not fooled – he quickly rushed in to fill the gap in the 3-man line to hold Peterson to 2 yards on a draw and force a 4th down and 3 at the Pickering 40. The Pats went for it, of course, but instead of trusting Manning to make a throw or pounding straight at the undermanned Pickering line with Peterson, the Pats once again tried finesse with another draw play. **Kyle Vanden Bosch** read it and tossed aside right tackle **Joe Staley** to stop Peterson at the line of scrimmage for no gain. The Pats had turned the ball over on downs and the dam looked like it was about to break.

Going in for the kill, Favre fired a long slant to Jackson for 27 yards to the Charleswood 33. Johnson added 8 more yards but a bad pass from Favre on 3rd down and 2 stopped the drive in its tracks, leading to a 42-yard field goal by **John Kasay** to give the Spartans the all-important two-score advantage, 27-17 with 7 minutes remaining in the game.

Jones returned a high, short kick 24 yards to give the Pats decent field position again at the 35. With 7:21 remaining, Manning still had plenty of time, but the steady downpour and messy field was beginning to come into play. After a short out pass to Rice gained 8 yards on 2nd and 10, the Pats gave the ball to Peterson on a sweep to the left, but the running back slipped trying to make his cut and was stopped for no gain. The Pats faced 4th down and 2 at their 43 yard line with the season on the line. Expecting a pass, the Spartans put 6 defensive backs on the field and sent Taylor on the blitz. The Pats, however, continued to try and run the ball with Peterson. Vanden Bosch again read the play as if he were in the Patriots' huddle and knocked Peterson back for a 1-yard loss before he got started. The Pickering sideline exploded in excitement as the defence came off the field.

The Spartans' final drive would be a fitting end to their spectacular 2010 season. Favre had one simple task: hand the ball off to **Chris Johnson**. The Pickering and EFL Offensive MVP did the rest against the demoralized Patriots defence. Johnson carried 6 times for 47 yards and finished the possession with a 6-yard TD run to give his team a commanding 34-17 lead with five seconds left before the two-minute warning. The Patriots offence began to celebrate. The 300 Spartans in the stands waved their plastic spears and chanted "NEVER SURRENDER." **Kris Dielman** and **Jeff Saturday** started to position themselves behind Head Coach, **Gus Kostantakos** for the ceremonial Gatorade dump.

But the Spartans' defence still had a job to do. Or did it? In a move that will be debated for its symbolism, the Patriots did something very unusual – **Peyton Manning** took a knee in defeat. The Pickering defenders could not believe it. Thinking it a trick, they remained in a deep prevent formation. But the Patriots continued to burn off the clock without attempting to advance the ball. A few scattered boos could be heard but were quickly drowned out by cheers of jubilation coming from thousands of ecstatic Pickering supporters. As the gun sounded a torrent of blue Gatorade fell upon the head of **Gus Kostantakos** and in, one fell swoop, he was hoisted onto the backs of **Jason Taylor** and **David Harris** for the victory ride to mid-field. The Spartans had conquered their final opposition and the triumph was sweet.

POST GAME

The Spartans had achieved what they had set out to achieve before the start of training camp – a Championship for the City of Pickering. At the time, nobody but the Spartans themselves believed it was possible. Too many obstacles had to be overcome and they carried the stigma of a loser after a painful 4-12 campaign in 2009. But there were hidden gems buried in their roster that only needed to be uncovered and polished with scrupulous care to yield their true value. One of those gems was Chris Johnson, whose incredible season may never be rivalled again for both magnitude of statistical achievement and for its effect on the team's bottom line – winning. The hired gun, Brett Favre, was his perfect partner, watching his back with deadly accuracy in the passing attack. The unsung Spartans' defence is now well-known, and well-feared, by opposing quarterbacks. With David Harris anchoring the middle and Asante Samuel shutting down one side of the field, all it needed to realize its full potential was a playmaker from the edge – and they got that playmaker at the trade deadline in Jason Taylor. The 2010 EFL Champions will be remembered for their offensive dominance and for their one-year rags-to-riches story. They will also be remembered as the first expansion team to win a title, another achievement few thought could be realized in the short period of 3 years. For Gus Kostantakos, the season could hardly have been more fulfilling.

Pickering's worthy opponent, Charleswood gave it their best shot with an aggressive game plan that both lifted them at times and dragged them down at others. In the end, their strategy was at best a wash and the final result may have been the same with a more conventional strategy. For Peyton Manning and Jason Findlay it was another playoff journey without satisfaction. The Pats remain the best franchise to never win a title, but unfortunately for their legacy, that distinction is not an official one. In closing the book on the 4th Gale Sayers Game, the words of network commentator, Bill Badden may have summarized it best: *"That was a football team we saw out there today. A real football team playing another real football team and the better football team won."*



*Who was slick in
the
Championship?*

**"BRYLCREEM" THE
EFL'S OLDEST SPONSOR**



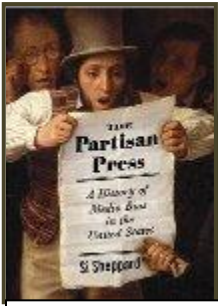
Chris Johnson
RB
**Pickering
Spartans**

**113 yds rushing, 46 yds rec, 1 TD to
top off a banner year in high style.**



David Harris
ILB
**Pickering
Spartans**

**10 tackles, 1 deflection, 2 stuffs, 1
fumble recovery. Defensive leader.**



The Partisan Press - Reaction in the News

"There is only one power in this world. It is the power of Sparta. Some will feel its blessing and others, the non-believers, will feel the sharp sting of its mighty point. Though we die who carry it from generation to generation, it lives on forever. It will forever torment Spats and his cursed progeny. And I, for one, will be highly pleased to know it's true. This is Sparta!" – *Aristedes Kalogiannis, Pickering Post*

"They fell short but they fell with pride. This was a great Charleswood team and well worthy of the stage. In spite of the weather and the referees our beloved Pats gave the Champs a run for their money. Better than the Dragons did, for sure. Peyton proved again that he is one of the best but sadly he did not get the support. Coach Findlay, architect of so many playoff teams, must be devastated that another year passes without a title. It will come, Jason, it will come." – *Charlie Wood, The Charleswood Sun*

"The highlight of the game for me was seeing Brett Favre's face when he fumbled the snap from Matt Birk that led to the second Patriots' touchdown. I had seen the same expression on Philip Rivers' face countless times, fumble or not. The wet ball does to a player what no other player can – make him feel like a complete klutz." – *Sir Reginald Malcolm Clapham, Durham Regional News*

* Championship * 02-16-2011 Jurassic Park Temp: 72 Wind: Calm MVP: [Chris Johnson](#)

	1	2	3	4	Tot
2009 Pickering (1-0)	14	3	0	17	34
2009 Charleswood (0-1)	0	7	10	0	17

1 6:36 Pickering	TD Harvin 21 run (Kasay) (6-80-3:31)	7-0
1 4:05 Pickering	TD Favre 21 pass to Jackson (Kasay) (1-21-0:14)	14-0
2 0:38 Charleswood	TD Peterson 1 run (Gostkowski) (14-93-6:34)	14-7
2 0:00 Pickering	FG Kasay 37 (4-36-0:32)	17-7
3 8:48 Charleswood	FG Gostkowski 34 (13-43-6:05)	17-10
3 5:03 Charleswood	TD Pickett 5 yd fumble recovery (Gostkowski) (0-0-0:05)	17-17
4 13:26 Pickering	TD Favre 23 pass to Harvin (Kasay) (12-83-6:31)	24-17
4 7:44 Pickering	FG Kasay 42 (5-35-2:37)	27-17
4 2:05 Pickering	TD Johnson 6 run (Kasay) (6-42-4:19)	34-17

	PIC	CHP
First Downs	18	18
Rushes	25-129	35-56
Passes	26-14-231	38-25-254
Sacked	0-0	0-0
Fumble	1	2
Penalties	5-36	5-48
Turnovers	1	1
Time	26:14	33:46
Third Down	6-10	3-15
Fourth Down	0-0	4-9
Red Att/Td/Fg	2/1/0	4/1/1
Net Offense	360	310

PICKERING

Passing	Att	Cmp	Yds	Sk	25	In	Td	Rate
Favre	26	14	231	0	3	0	2	109.6

Rushing	Att	Yds	Ave	FD	10	Lg	TD
Johnson	22	113	5.1	6	4	13	1
Harvin	1	21	21	1	1	21	1
Favre	2	-5	-2.5	0	0	0	0

Receiving	No	Dp	Att	Yds	Ave	FD	25	Lg	TD
Jackson	5	1	10	122	24.4	4	3	36	1
Johnson	4	1	5	47	11.8	3	0	20	0
Harvin	2	0	3	33	16.5	1	0	23	1
Boldin	2	0	2	23	11.5	2	0	12	0
Sproles	1	0	1	6	6	1	0	6	0
Gonzalez	0	0	5	0	0	0	0	0	0

CHARLESWOOD

Passing	Att	Cmp	Yds	Sk	25	In	Td	Rate
Manning	38	25	254	0	0	0	0	85

Rushing	Att	Yds	Ave	FD	10	Lg	TD
Peterson	28	59	2.1	5	1	12	1
Manning	7	-3	-0.4	0	0	1	0

Receiving	No	Dp	Att	Yds	Ave	FD	25	Lg	TD
Witten	7	0	10	47	6.7	2	0	9	0
Rice	7	0	9	62	8.9	2	0	16	0
Berrian	5	0	8	64	13	3	0	19	0
Colston	4	0	6	49	12	2	0	19	0
Jones	1	0	1	11	11	1	0	11	0
Peterson	1	0	4	21	21	1	0	21	0



AT THE EFL CHAMPIONSHIP *With Spats McChad*

DURHAM – So much about the Thunder Lizards that had confused me before is now very clear. They play half their games in a stadium plopped in the middle of a landscape that might as well be on another planet for all it resembles Earth. It's no wonder that they don't perform as expected – they play in bizarre and, many would agree, inhumane conditions.

From the air Jurassic Park looks like a steaming crater scarring a flat suburban sprawl east of Toronto. From the ground it is practically invisible except for the wave of heat rising from it, bending the grey winter light and distorting the view of the horizon beyond.

Jurassic Park should not be; but it is.

Much has been written about Jurassic Park. Its wonders have been explored in countless television and film documentaries and the sight of the fern-covered stadium bowl from the *Plode Blimp* is familiar to football fans everywhere. But, like the Grand Canyon, you have to experience it in the flesh to really appreciate it. Although, in the case of Jurassic Park, I use the word “appreciate” strictly in its *keen awareness* sense as opposed to placing a high value on the experience.

The locals tell me ‘The Park’ (as they call it) is nicest in the Fall, but that it can get wet in the Winter and really wet in the Spring. I don't know what they mean by “really wet” and I can't imagine it either – unless it means being under water. I have never felt so wet while fully clothed and I was *inside* a booth during the game! Being a spectator was extremely uncomfortable and, as a result, I drank a lot of beer – which was readily available, cheap and strong. That, actually, was the best part about Jurassic Park – the beer. It made me forget how damp my underwear was and how, at any moment, I might be snatched up and shredded by that terrifying mascot, Raptorius Blaster.

As the local news had predicted, it was raining on game day at Jurassic Park while it snowed everywhere else. (Gee, they sure went out on a limb with that prediction!) I am told that the genetically engineered prehistoric flora in the park grows so quickly that landscapers work around the clock to keep the vegetation off the roads and to prevent the

stadium from being engulfed by giant ferns. I did not really believe that until I noticed the grass growing on the field while the Spartans and the Pats went through their pre-game warm-ups. No joke – if you looked closely, you could see it grow. It's a phenomenon most likely to occur when it's raining out, which it was. An army of high-tech lawn mowers was mobilized every hour or so to keep the grass on the field short enough to play on – much like a zamboni smoothing out the ice at a hockey rink in between periods.

I could not imagine how the players felt. I was too pre-occupied with my own misery to really care anyway. How could the league think it was a good idea to host its banner event in this place? Oh, how could I forget – EFL Commissioner **Yorgo Kaldis** and Durham Thunder Lizards owner **George Kaldis** are identical twins! *This had better be a good game*, I thought to myself.

THE PRESS GALLERY

One of the best parts of the Gale Sayers Game is hobnobbing in the press gallery with my fellow writers. After a few drinks (and everybody except **William Wyrwright** drinks!) everybody's *real* opinions come out and sometimes they are real eye-openers. Of course, one of the unwritten rules of the profession is that these candid opinions are held in strict confidence unless your conversation partner adds, “And you can quote me on that,” to the end of a sentence. Of course, after several drinks almost everybody adds, “and you can quote me on that,” to add emphasis to his or



My buddy and fellow journalist, **Jean Boisvert** of Florida's Swamp Land Proof poses for the camera at Jurassic Park. He wasn't smiling 5 seconds later when the T-Rex he thought was a fake suddenly belched.



The 'JURASSICUTTER 8000'(ABOVE) carries a \$140,000 price tag and goes through an average of 65 blades a year cutting the ever-growing *Coniferus Bulbae Segmentae* that forms the main component of Jurassic Park's 'Dino Turf.' (BELOW) Look closely and you can actually see it growing.



point so it can get a little complicated trying to decide what is fair game for an article and what is not since it is also an unwritten rule that you cannot quote a fellow journalist who says "and you can quote me on that" when that person is drunk.

Determining when somebody is drunk when you are, yourself, also drunk is a bit of a challenge at times, so most of us leave it to **Gabrielle Laurent-Vainluven** to set the bar. She has worked out, give or take one or two, how many drinks it takes to get any of us inebriated. Her gossiping instincts allow her to effortlessly keep track of everybody's imbibing rate for the time we are together and when somebody shouts, "And you can quote me on that," the others will turn to her and she will give the thumbs up if it is printable, or the thumbs down if it is not.

Her work is much appreciated by us all. Otherwise, writers like **Orville Smucker** would likely be out of work. Poor old Orville can drink at a steady rate all night and look and act like he has not had a drop. But as Gabrielle discovered in the 2007 Championship Game between Charleswood and Chino, Orville actually gets sauced as a newt after two beers and says the darndest and most shocking things in the most measured and reasonable tones. On the opposite end of the spectrum, the loud and obnoxious **Aristedes Kalogiannis** can drink ouzo all night long and walk a straight line to his car and drive it perfectly in reverse for miles – something I understand he once did to prove his sobriety after a night of drinking. Too bad he can't string a coherent sentence together on paper, sober or not. **Lanny McDonald**.....well the less said about his drinking habits the better.

As usual, I ended up sitting next to **Jean Boisvert** of the *Swampland Proof*. He had been talking with **Sir Reginald Malcolm Clapham**, a chap in his mid-fifties who sported a large handlebar moustache, a monocle and a white pith helmet. He spoke like somebody out of a Rudyard Kipling novel. "*I daresay there are places like this occurring naturally in the most remote locations on Earth. Science has not discovered them because they are concealed by the most inhospitable climes imaginable, my dear fellow,*" he waxed grandiosely to Jean as his arm swept across the front of his chest to indicate the park. "*I am here to study the dinosaurs and to prepare my expedition to the Andes. I just write about football to pay the bills.*"

Apparently there is good money in covering the Thunder Lizards. Most local journalists stay away from Jurassic Park after the unfortunate "accident" that befell one of their own when the park opened in 2007. The team's owner, **Celine Dion**, had apparently made the appropriate payoffs in an out-of-court settlement to keep the whole incident under wraps. But enough information had leaked out that people were fairly certain that what happened had involved a brontosaurus, a tail and extreme difficulty in identifying the body.

A veritable who's who of EFL journalism was gathered in the Jurassic Park press gallery and the talk centered more on the weather than on the game. A short stocky guy with a military haircut and dark glasses, who writes for the Hellfire under the pseudonym 'Desert Rat,' kept leaving the gallery to change his shirt. "*Randy's going crazy here,*" **Jean Boisvert** remarked to me in reference to him. "*Keep an eye on him, he might kill somebody. He's got one of those Special Forces tattoos.*"

Gabriele Laurent-Vainluven, not surprisingly, had adapted to her social situation and the environment. She sported a teal and magenta scuba suit decorated with red netting and a flowing gold tail made from some type of latex material. She looked ridiculous, but carried it off surprisingly well and answered any detracting comments with the line, "*at least I'm comfortable, darling!*"

Quentin San Pedro of the Chino Champion tried to order nachos but was told they don't sell them in the gallery because the crunch vanishes and they get soggy within minutes of opening the bag. If he wanted nachos, he had to go the exclusive Dinos Club where they had a bank of de-humidifiers to keep the air at normal dryness. After unleashing a string of profanity, Quentin ordered chilli and a large Corona and flipped open his I-PAD.

There were some real characters in this place. There was a new guy wearing a stocking cap emblazoned with moons and stars from York who called himself, **Merlin the Magician**. "*I'm the real one,*" he told me, nodding in the direction of **Merlin Pendragon** of the Miami Herald and shaking his head, "*Not him. The name is pure coincidence.*" **Coots Schweizerschnitzel** from Kutztown, wearing a feathered cloth cap, was already drunk as a skunk and the game hadn't even started. "*He's mourning the*

loss of the Golden Bears,” explained Jean, who was courteously briefing me since I had arrived last. **Lanny McDonald** was doing shooters with Coots and his nose was starting to light a corner of the room.

Sparky McGillicuddy from Iowa City was sitting at his desk staring down at the field and typing away on his Smith-Corona typewriter. Almost everyone else had computers, but Sparky had an actual typewriter complete with a black and red ink ribbon and a bell. Not even **Orville Smucker** used a typewriter – that old geezer preferred a leather-bound note book and pen to record his thoughts. I looked at Smucker. He sat pensively at his table, chin in hand holding a philosopher’s pose for what seemed like a very long time. Finally, Gabby glided over, gently nudged him and whispered, *“Orville, the game’s starting, wake up!”*

I did not bother to look for **Aristedes Kalogiannis**, he was not there. Had he been I would have heard him bellowing. Neither was **Charlie Wood**, the highly esteemed but opinionated Patriots scribe. Both of them, with a higher stake in the game, had places of honour with the television crews from their local broadcasts.

Looking around the room it dawned on me exactly why none of these people had careers in television. *Am I the only normal one?* I thought as I sat down, wiped my workspace with hand sanitizer and put on my latex gloves.

THE GAME

Watching the Patriots trying to keep pace with the Spartans reminded me of a line from Kenny Rodgers’ song, ‘The Gambler.’ If *“know when to walk away”* had been whispered in **Jason Findlay’s** ear seconds before he made the decision to go for a first down on 4th down and 1 at his own 20, down 7-0 in the first quarter, the outcome of this game might have been very different. Or it might have been the same, but closer. Or it might have been worse. Nobody can know for sure. The only thing I know for sure is that such a gamble at such a time falls off the scale of acceptable risks. Yes, it could have worked; but getting the ball to the 21 yard line with a new set of downs was not going to make or break the game for Charleswood. Failing to get the first down and thereby turning the ball over to Pickering in field goal range, however, did have the potential to make a steep climb even more difficult for the Patriots. The risk of that move decidedly outweighed the reward in my humble view.

Having said that, I had to admire the tenacity with which the Pats stuck to their bold game plan. In almost all situations punting was not an option. As a result the Pats maintained control of the ball for more than half the game and kept the dangerous Spartans offence off the field. If only the Pats’ offence had proved capable of moving the ball in bigger chunks. Their longest play from scrimmage was a 21-yard screen pass to **Adrian Peterson**. For the rest of the afternoon they looked like a team that needed four, or sometimes five downs to move the ball 10 yards. That kind of offensive inefficiency is not going to win many games in this league; forget the Championship.

Before the sound of the final gun blame was looking for a place to rest in the Patriots’ camp. (There always has to be blame when teams fail to do as well as hoped). My compatriots in the Press Gallery were divided on the issue of blame. The majority blamed Findlay while a sizeable minority, led most vocally by **Sir Reginald Malcolm Clapham**, blamed Peterson. **Coots Schweizerschnitzel**, from the floor of the gallery where he lay moving in and out of consciousness, blamed *“that fag, Manning”* for the loss. *“And you can quote me on that,”* he added after letting out a belch. Gabby gave the thumbs up, I think, because she was angry at Coots for ripping the gold tail off her outfit.

The reasons for blaming Findlay ranged from the general, *“the coach has to take the responsibility for any loss,”* (Orville Smucker); to the specific, *“he gave the ball to Peterson when he shouldn’t have and didn’t give it to him when he should have,”* (Randy the Desert Rat); and in between, *“the no-punt strategy was foolish,”* (Merlin Pendragon). Peterson was blamed for being *“uncreative,”* (Merlin the Magician), *“hesitant,”* (Sir Malcolm) and *“a stupid idiot,”* (Lanny McDonald).

Everyone had a valid, or at least entertaining, point to make about the critical points in the game. But the main point was somehow being missed in all the debate about how Charleswood had failed to upset the Spartans. It was so obvious to me that I finally had enough and told everyone to shut-up. To my surprise, they did. Perhaps the surgical mask I donned at half time to keep the prehistoric swamp gases out of my nose lent a sense of urgency to my words. Whatever it was, the gathered elite of Elite Football League journalism looked at me and waited.

“The Spartans were the better team,” I said. *“It wasn’t even close.”*

There was a moment of silence, then the sound of shuffling feet, then finally...words. *“Well, yes, of course,”* someone said. *“That goes without saying,”* said another. *“They had it in the bag all along, no question,”* said **Merlin the Magician**, the only journalist other than **Charlie Wood** to have predicted an outright Charleswood victory in this game.

In my view, the Pats did a masterful job making it to the 4th quarter tied 17-17. They may have overplayed their hand at times, but they kept the audience glued to the screen for a lot longer than any sane prognosticator had expected. The team they faced had shattered the bar for offensive efficiency in the regular season and had brought along the league’s #2 ranked defence just to make sure they got the ball often and in good field position. The Spartans’ team that had humbled Florida two weeks earlier was no regular contender – they were a force as unstoppable as the wind or the rain that fell on Jurassic Park for three straight days. For every holding penalty called on the hapless Charleswood offensive line I guarantee there were three or four that were ignored for the sake of the TV ratings. Take away a temporary Brett Favre vapour-lock for two series in the third quarter and the Pats would never have scored 17 points and the game would have been a laugh.

THOUGHTS AS I CHANGE MY UNDERWEAR

As I change my underwear in the washroom stall of Jurassic Park I think that the EFL is doing pretty well. While 2010 was a different kind of season, frustrating and bizarre at times, it will be one of the more memorable ones historically because of the two teams at the top of the league – Pickering and Florida. They were truly in a class all by themselves. Excellent teams like Charleswood, Chino, and Durham all paled in comparison with the Spartans and the Dragons. The decisive factor in reserving a special place for them in league history is that their success was no accident – it was earned due to brilliant management and superlative talent.

As I change my underwear in the washroom stall of Jurassic Park I also think that the delay of expansion until 2012 will be good for the EFL. More is not necessarily better and stability is paramount. While I pause to regret the loss of the small markets of Kutztown and Ringgold, and wish my colleague **Coots Schweizerschnitzel** the best of luck as he turns to covering the Berks County Texas Hold'em Poker League, I am also looking forward to the opportunities present in the more dynamic and diverse markets of Chicago and South Carolina. The delay also gives my home town, New York City, more time to prepare a bid.

Now that I have changed my underwear I feel much better, but I know if I don't get out of this stadium soon I will get another flashback to life as a toddler.

EFL NAMES OFFENSIVE AND DEFENSIVE MOST VALUABLE PLAYERS



OFFENSIVE M.V.P.



Chris Johnson
Pickering Spartans

Chris Johnson set records for yards rushing (2156), rushing TDs (27), total TDs (29), rushing average (5.8), rushing gains of 10+ (61), and rushing first downs (123). The Pickering running back was also named Game MVP 12 times during the regular season, an informal league record. His team finished 15-1, losing to the only undefeated team in the league. Johnson was selected by 11 of 14 voters (78%).



DEFENSIVE M.V.P.



Darrelle Revis
Florida Dragons

Darrelle Revis finished the season with 42 tackles, 11 passes deflections, 4 interceptions and 1 TD in 16 games played. Opposing quarterbacks completed just 39% of passes and posted a combined rating of 48.4 when targeting receivers covered by Revis. He was mostly a silent killer, sealing off one side of the field. His team finished 16-0 and ranked #1 in defence. Revis was selected by 5 of 14 votes (35%).