

# 2011

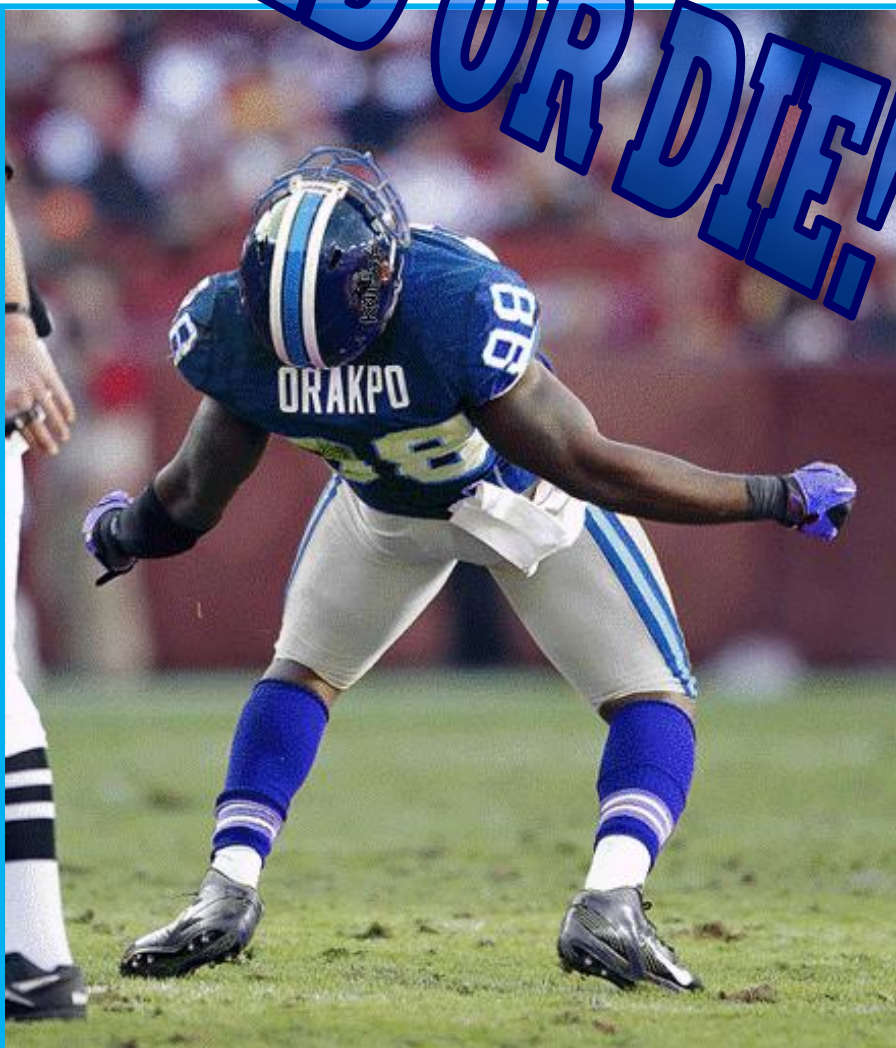


# 2011

## CONFERENCE FINALS PLAYOFF EDITION

February 12, 2012

**YIELD OR DIE!**



### LATEST EFL NEWS INSIDE

#### THE GAMES

- DARK KNIGHT FOR DEATH VALLEY
- GLADS DISPATCH DINOS AT THE COLISEUM

#### COMMENT

“The Rubber Shield,” “Nothing funny about Durham,” “Of Pirates and Kings,” “MVP Search,” and MORE– Spats McChad

#### PREDICTIONS

‘The BIG GAME will be a titanic struggle between two fine defences. Which offence will break first? Jimmy Knows! – Jimmy the Geek

L.A. linebacker, **Brian Orakpo** bellows the Knights' challenge after sacking and stripping the ball from **Drew Brees** in 4<sup>th</sup> quarter Conference Final action. **Charles Woodson** snatched the loose ball and returned it 42 yards for the eventual game-winning TD in a 35-33 victory over Death Valley. (Story inside)



*Who was slick in the Conference Finals?*

**“BRYLCREEM” THE EFL'S FIRST SPONSOR**



**Vince Young**  
QB  
Gwinnett  
Gladiators

**OFFENSE**

14 of 22, 201 yards, 1 TD, 28 yards rushing to lead Glads' attack.



**Brian Orakpo**  
OLB  
Los Angeles  
Knights

**DEFENSE**

4 tackles, 2 sacks, 2 QB pressures and 2 FFs to save the day for L.A.

# PACIFIC-ATLANTIC CONFERENCE FINAL

## KNIGHTS SHOOT DOWN BREES IN DOG FIGHT! 4 DEATH VALLEY TURNOVERS TURN THE TIDE



**DEATH VALLEY  
UNDERTAKERS**

**33**

**35**

**LOS ANGELES  
KNIGHTS**



### UNDERTAKER OF THE GAME

**Drew Brees**

37 of 57, 457 yds, 2 TDs, 2 INTs

Team	1	2	3	4	OT	Total
DEATH VALLEY (10-8)	10	6	3	14	-	33
LOS ANGELES (15-3)	14	7	7	7	-	35

### KNIGHT OF THE GAME

**Jamaal Charles**

14 carries, 63 yards, 2 TDs

**HIGHLIGHT REEL:** Roddy White had 7 receptions for 83 yards and 1 TD.

- **Josh Freeman** completed 17 of 20 for 197 yards, 1 TD and 1 INT and rushed for 32 yards and 1 TD on 7 carries.
- **Brian Orakpo** made 4 tackles, recorded 2 sacks, 2 QBV pressures and forced 2 fumbles.
- **Rob Gronkowski** was Brees' favourite target with 9 catches for 115 yards.
- **Braylon Edwards** caught 8 passes for 123 yards, 1 TD and a long of 44; **Andre Johnson** caught 5 for 70 yards and a long of 24.
- **Brett Keisel** was an unlikely defensive star for Death Valley with 4 tackles, 1 deflection, 1 forced fumble and 1 interception.



### THE FANS LOVED

Pure Offence vs Pure Defence



### THE FANS HATED

15 yards rushing for DV



**FAN RATING**

**GAME SUMMARY:** With Los Angeles clinging to a 28-26 lead and Death Valley driving with 5:25 remaining in the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter, Knights' linebacker **Brian Orakpo** sacked and stripped **Drew Brees** at the Undertakers' 41 yard line and tossed the ball to **Charles Woodson**, who carried it 42 yards for what would turn out to be the winning touchdown in a 35-33 PAC Championship victory. It was the last, and most devastating, of four turnovers for the Undertakers that finally sunk their hopes for an upset on the road against the West Division title holders. Despite surrendering over 400 yards and allowing Death Valley to control the time of possession, the 'Blue Shield' made the plays that mattered and gave their offence opportunities that, under the guidance of quarterback **Josh Freeman** and the running of **Jamaal Charles**, they did not squander. LA's defence made their mark on the very first Undertaker play from scrimmage. **Ryan Mathews** took the hand-off at the Death Valley 26 and was immediately bashed and stripped by **Kevin Williams**. The loose ball was recovered by **B.J. Raji**, setting up a 19-yard touchdown run by Charles two plays later to give the Knights an early 7-0 lead. Death Valley showed their determination on their next possession after **Brandon Tate** returned the ensuing kickoff 70 yards to the LA 28 yard line. A 12-yard pass to **Aaron Hernandez** to convert 3<sup>rd</sup> down led to an 8-yard touchdown pass to **Braylon Edwards** to tie the game, 7-7. Death Valley would take their only lead of the game on the heels of a **Brent Keisel** interception of Freeman on the Knights' next possession. They recovered at the LA 21 and moved it to the 9 on the next play, but a pair of negative runs forced them to settle for a 34-yard **John Kasay** field goal to make it 10-7. The Knights' offence did not let the lead stand for long as they drove the field on the strength of consecutive completions of 12 yards to **Roddy White** and 22 yards **Tony Gonzalez** to get inside the red zone. Two plays later, Freeman scrambled 7 yards for the go-ahead touchdown to make it 14-10. The Knights' defence denied the next two Death Valley counterattacks in dramatic fashion with back-to-picks: the first by **Jeremiah Bell** inside the LA red zone and the second by **Antoine Bethea** at the 23 that he returned 51 yards to the Undertakers' 26, setting up Charles' second rushing TD for a 21-10 Knights lead. Three straight field goals by Kasay brought the Undertakers within two, trailing 21-19 in the 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter, but the Knights' offence got on track finally with a 10-play, 75-yard drive that ended with a 21-yard TD pass to White to make it 28-19. Brees continued to hammer at the LA secondary, completing passes of 44, 22 and 17 yards to Edwards that led to a 1-yard TD run by Mathews to make it 28-26; but the 'Blue Shield' struck the final blow in the end to earn the Knights the Conference Title.



## SCORING RE-CAP

\* Playoff \* 02-10-2012 Round Table Stadium Temp: 53 Wind: 0-10 None MVP: **Jamaal Charles**

1 12:07	Los Angeles	TD Charles 19 run (Carpente,D) (2-26-0:50)	0-7
1 9:36	Death Valley	TD Brees 8 pass to Edwards (Kasay) (6-28-2:24)	7-7
1 6:56	Death Valley	FG Kasay 34 (5-5-1:41)	10-7
1 3:00	Los Angeles	TD Freeman 7 run (Carpente,D) (7-76-3:48)	10-14
2 8:15	Los Angeles	TD Charles 13 run (Carpente,D) (3-26-1:47)	10-21
2 4:16	Death Valley	FG Kasay 28 (9-41-3:49)	13-21
2 0:01	Death Valley	FG Kasay 33 (9-47-2:54)	16-21
3 9:01	Death Valley	FG Kasay 41 (10-52-5:40)	19-21
3 2:32	Los Angeles	TD Freeman 21 pass to White (Carpente,D) (10-75-6:21)	19-28
4 13:56	Death Valley	TD Mathews 1 run (Kasay) (9-86-3:29)	26-28
4 5:25	Los Angeles	TD Woodson 42 yd fumble recovery (Carpente,D) (0-0-0:55)	26-35
4 2:01	Death Valley	TD Brees 6 pass to Manningham (Kasay) (9-77-3:17)	33-35

	DVU	LAK
First Downs	27	16
Rushes	12-15	25-120
Passes	57-37-457	20-17-197
Sacked	4-35	0-0
Fumble	4	2
Penalties	3-20	5-51
Turnovers	4	1
Time	34:36	25:24
Third Down	10-16	3-8
Fourth Down	0-0	0-1
Red Att/Td/Fg	6/3/2	3/3/0
Net Offense	437	317

### DEATH VALLEY

Passing	Att	Cmp	Yds	Sk	25	In	Td	Rate	
Brees	57	37	457	4	3	2	2	86.7	
Rushing	Att	Yds	Ave	FD	10	Lg	TD		
Mathews	10	19	1.9	2	0	6	1		
Brees	1	1	1	0	0	1	0		
Hernandez	1	-5	-5	0	0	0	0		
Receiving	No	Dp	Att	Yds	Ave	FD	25	Lg	TD
Gronkowski	9	0	11	115	12.8	5	2	28	0
Edwards	8	0	12	123	15.4	5	1	44	1
Hernandez	7	1	11	61	8.7	5	0	12	0
Johnson,A	5	0	14	70	14.0	3	0	24	0
Mathews	3	0	3	32	10.7	1	0	14	0
Manningham	3	0	4	34	11.3	3	0	21	1
Hester	2	0	2	22	11.0	1	0	17	0

### LOS ANGELES

Passing	Att	Cmp	Yds	Sk	25	In	Td	Rate	
Freeman	20	17	197	0	0	1	1	104	
Rushing	Att	Yds	Ave	FD	10	Lg	TD		
Charles	14	63	4.5	4	2	19	2		
Freeman	7	32	4.6	1	1	12	1		
Greene	4	25	6.3	1	1	23	0		
Receiving	No	Dp	Att	Yds	Ave	FD	25	Lg	TD
White	7	0	8	83	11.9	4	0	21	1
Gonzalez	5	0	5	71	14.2	3	0	22	0
Smith	3	0	3	29	9.7	1	0	18	0
Greene	2	0	2	14	7.0	1	0	8	0
Charles	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Freeman	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0



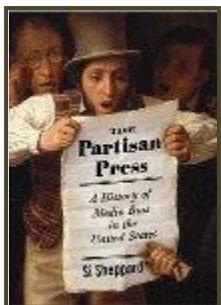
### INJURIES

DEATH VALLEY – Stefan Wisniewski (1 game-OUT)

LOS ANGELES – None

### QUOTE OF THE GAME

"We played hard. We had to play hard because they pushed us hard! They have a great quarterback. They nearly took us out." – *Knights' safety, Antoine Bethea.*



## The Partisan Press - Reaction in the News

"Drew Brees was a rain of acid on the enemy, but he did not protect himself from his own weapon. The corrosive hail fell indiscriminately, burning him as much as the hated Knights." – *Grim Reaper, Death Valley Obituary.*

"That number nine on the other team was really mean! He almost beat us! That would have been a disaster! Black and white is out!" – *Gabrielle Laurent-Vainluven, LA Daily News.*

# CAN-AM CONFERENCE FINAL

## GLADIATORS VANQUISH DINOS! DEFENCE DOMINATES AS GLADS ADVANCE TO FINAL



**DURHAM THUNDER  
LIZARDS**

**10**

**24**

**GWINNETT  
GLADIATORS**



### LIZARD OF THE GAME

**Dwayne Bowe**

4 catches, 100 yds, 1 TD

Team	1	2	3	4	OT	Total
<b>DURHAM</b> (10-8)	0	3	0	7	-	10
<b>GWINNETT</b> (13-5)	3	14	0	7	-	24

### GLADIATOR OF THE GAME

**Vince Young**

14 of 22, 21 yards, 1 TD

**HIGHLIGHT REEL:** **Ahmad Bradshaw** carried the ball 21 carries for 76 yards and 2 TDs.

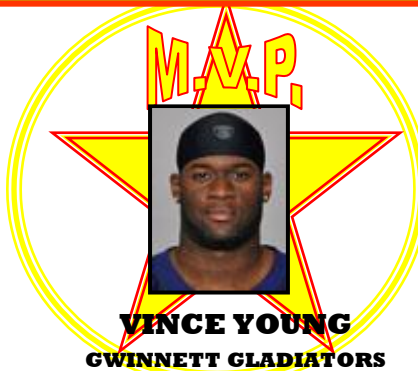
- **Reggie Wayne** caught 7 passes for 106 yards and 6 first downs
- Defensive end **Mathias Kiwanuka** made 5 tackles, 2 sacks, 1 QB pressure, while **Robert Mathis** had 1 sack and 2 QB pressures.
- **Jared Allen** made 7 tackles, notched 1 sack, deflected 1 pass and stuffed 2 runs.
- **Reggie Bush** gained 44 yards on 8 carries while **Michael Turner** had just 4 yards on 2 carries.
- **Philip Rivers** completed 9 of 22 for 129 yards and was sacked 3 times for a game day QB rating of 60.2.



**THE FANS LOVED**  
Dominant Glad 'D'



**THE FANS HATED**  
Lack of competitiveness



**FAN RATING**

**GAME SUMMARY:** **Josh Brown** nailed a 51-yard field goal in the 1<sup>st</sup> quarter to open the scoring and give the Gladiators a 3-0 lead. It stayed that way until early in the 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter when the Gladiators mounted a drive from their own 32 yard line that featured a mix of runs by **Ahmad Bradshaw**, scrambles by **Vince Young** and a 19-yard pass to **Reggie Wayne** that helped set up a 5-yard TD run off left tackle by Bradshaw to increase the Gwinnett lead to 10-0. Durham charged back, converting back-to-back 3<sup>rd</sup> and longs with pass completions of 24 yards to **Dwayne Bowe** and 19 yards to **Calvin Johnson**, but their attack fizzled out at the Glads' 5 yard line, bringing on **Adam Vinatieri** for 23-yard field goal to make the score 10-3. The Gladiators answered with a 63-yard drive, keyed by runs of 18 and 10 yards by **LeSean McCoy** and a 28-yard pass completion to Wayne that ended with a 6-yard check down from Young to seldom-used tight end **Ed Dickson** to bolster their lead to 17-3 heading into half time. The second half began with Durham turning to the ground game but ultimately failing to convert 4<sup>th</sup> down and 2 at the Gwinnett 37 yard line. A back-and-forth battle for field position followed until it was broken by the Gladiators after Vinatieri missed a 50-yard field goal near the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter. A 23-yard pass to Wayne drove the Glads into Durham territory, then a 13-yard run by Bradshaw and a 5-yard pass to **Nate Burleson** overcame a **Jared Allen** sack to bring the ball to the Thunder Lizards' 23 yard line. A 17-yard pass to Burleson got the Glads close enough for another 5-yard TD run by Bradshaw, this one from off right tackle, to give the Gladiators a commanding 24-3 lead. In a desperate attempt to spark a comeback, **Philip Rivers** was permanently pulled in favour of **John Skelton**, who proceeded to throw an interception to **Leodis McKelvin** on his third play from scrimmage. In charge of a 21-point lead in the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter, the Glads looked to burn time off the clock with the running game, posting two straight three-and-outs before surrendering the ball to the Lizards for their final long drive. With six defensive backs on the field for Gwinnett, Skelton was able to scrape his way through the air to the Gwinnett 47, where he connected with Bowe on a medium out pass that he ran the distance to the end zone for a Durham TD to make the score 24-10. With 2:26 remaining, down by two touchdowns, the Lizards kicked onside and **Tedd Ginn Jr.** recovered at the Durham 43 yard line. For a brief moment a miracle seemed remotely possible, but Skelton was stuffed for a 3-yard loss on a 4<sup>th</sup> down bootleg attempt to give the Gladiators the ball with 1:49 remaining. Back-up QB, **Levi Brown** presided over the "victory formation" and the rest is history.

## SCORING RE-CAP

\* Playoff \* 02-11-2012 Gwinnett Coliseum Temp: 48 Wind: 0-10 None MVP: Vince Young

1 8:36	Gwinnett	FG Brown 51 (11-45-6:11)	0-3
2 9:49	Gwinnett	TD Bradshaw 5 run (Brown,J) (10-68-5:31)	0-10
2 5:22	Durham	FG Vinatieri 23 (13-62-4:15)	3-10
2 1:44	Gwinnett	TD Young 6 pass to Dickson (Brown,J) (7-63-3:30)	3-17
4 14:06	Gwinnett	TD Bradshaw 5 run (Brown,J) (8-60-4:42)	3-24
4 2:32	Durham	TD Skelton 47 pass to Bowe (Vinatieri) (10-93-2:33)	10-24

	DTL	GWG
First Downs	16	23
Rushes	18-54	37-152
Passes	41-16-234	22-14-201
Sacked	3-12	2-12
Fumble	0	0
Penalties	2-27	5-40
Turnovers	1	0
Time	25:54	34:06
Third Down	4-14	3-9
Fourth Down	1-3	0-0
Red Att/Td/Fg	1/0/1	3/3/0
Net Offense	276	341

### DURHAM

Passing	Att	Cmp	Yds	Sk	25	In	Td	Rate
Rivers	22	9	127	3	0	0	0	60.2
Skelton	17	7	107	0	1	1	1	57.7
Tebow	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	39.6

Rushing	Att	Yds	Ave	FD	10	Lg	TD
Bush,R	8	35	4.4	1	1	14	0
Tebow	3	10	3.3	0	0	8	0
Rivers	1	5	5.0	0	0	5	0
Turner	2	4	2.0	0	0	2	0
Bush,M	1	1	1.0	0	0	1	0
Amendola	1	0	0.0	0	0	0	0
Skelton	2	-1	-0.5	0	0	2	0

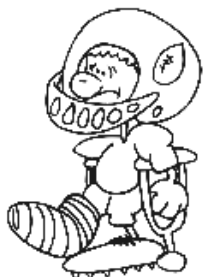
Receiving	No	Dp	Att	Yds	Ave	FD	25	Lg	TD
Johnson,C	5	1	10	55	11.0	4	0	19	0
Bowe	4	1	16	100	25.0	4	1	47	1
Amendola	2	0	6	26	13.0	2	0	17	0
Gates	2	1	4	22	11.0	1	0	13	0
Bush,R	2	0	3	23	11.5	2	0	12	0
Richardson	1	0	1	8	8.0	0	0	8	0
Bush,M	0	0	1	0	0	0	-	0	0

### GWINNETT

Passing	Att	Cmp	Yds	Sk	25	In	Td	Rate
Young	22	14	201	2	2	0	1	108

Rushing	Att	Yds	Ave	FD	10	Lg	TD
Bradshaw	21	76	3.6	4	1	13	2
McCoy	4	36	9.0	3	2	18	0
Young	5	28	5.6	1	0	8	0
Lewis	4	15	3.8	0	1	13	0
Brown,L	3	-3	-1.0	0	0	0	0

Receiving	No	Dp	Att	Yds	Ave	FD	25	Lg	TD
Wayne	7	0	8	106	15.1	6	1	28	0
Burleson	3	1	5	50	16.7	3	1	28	0
Maclin	2	0	3	29	14.5	2	0	15	0
Dickson	1	0	1	6	6.0	1	0	6	1
McCoy	1	0	2	10	10.0	1	0	10	0
Young	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Scaife	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0



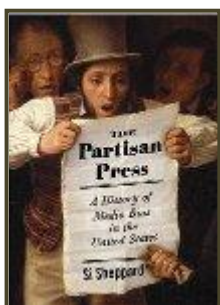
### INJURIES

DURHAM – None

GWINNETT – Dunta Robinson (1 game-DOUBTFUL); Mike Pouncey (2 games); Jeremy Maclin (PG-2<sup>nd</sup>); Vernon Carey (2 games)

### QUOTE OF THE GAME

"I want to come out and play strong every time but especially now. It's the playoffs and I missed so many games. I just wanted to help out – to be part of it!" – *Gwinnett defensive end, Mathius Kiwanuka, who had 2 sacks.*



## The Partisan Press - Reaction in the News

"Our offensive line was overpowered. That did not give Philip comfort in the pocket and he reacted with overemphasis on the game plan. Even when the play did not call for Bowe, he threw to Bowe. It was a disaster." – *Sir Reginald Malcolm Clapham, Durham Diggat!*

"Where there is unity, there is always victory. This team was united behind Vincivus Youngus. All Hail the Moor!" – *Aurelius Maximus, Gwinnett Tribune.*





# AROUND THE



## With Spats McChad

NEW YORK – *Football Heaven* is so awesome it actually includes everyone in the football moment in the fullest and funniest way possible. It is a strip bar with clothes – the patrons are left to imagine the rest. The girls wear team jerseys but it is obvious from the moment you ask even a basic question that they know little about the team or the player whose name is emblazoned across the backs of their slender shoulders. This became awkwardly apparent when my server Krista, wearing a red #20 Ed Reed jersey, told me that she hoped the Pats' safety would "make an interception today."

*'Sorry, Krista, Ed Reed and his pansy-assed team got their asses kicked by Drew Brees and the Undertakers last week and have gone golfing or whatever else they do when they aren't playing mediocre football,'* I felt like saying. Instead, I smiled charmingly and said, "I hope so. Ed Reed is my favourite player, too." I then gave her an inappropriately large tip.

### THE RUBBER SHIELD

I have no doubt that Satan had his hands full when **Chris Worthley** was his guest in Hell. The Undertakers' coach is boldly insolent in his game plans and possesses the perfect instrument to affect his purpose in **Drew Brees**. The Death Valley quarterback attempted 57 passes, completing 37 of them for 457 yards and 2 touchdowns in his Conference Final match-up against Los Angeles. That was the upside. On the downside, the Undertakers showed no respect whatsoever for the Knights' corner tandem of **Charles Woodson** and **Nnamdi Asomugha**, and wound up paying the price. A pair of timely interceptions: the first by **Jeremiah Bell** to stop an Undertakers' drive in the red zone; and the second by **Antoine Bethea** returned to the Death Valley 26 yard line to set up LA's third touchdown; should have been ample warning for the **Men in Black** to tone it down a bit. But, *no!* Brees flung the ball all over the field with reckless abandon even after he had been burned.

His devil-may-care approach almost worked, but in the end he waited a split second too long waiting for a receiver to get open and was blind-sided by **Brian Orakpo**, who stripped him of the ball at the Death Valley 43. Orakpo lateralled it to Woodson, who ran it the distance for a touchdown and a 35-26 Los Angeles lead that would hold up in a wild 35-33 Knights' win to grab the PAC Championship. It was a big scare for the Los Angeles defence, one that had not given up that many yards in a single game this season and had never given up over 450 yards through the air in its history. Coach **Jeff Dohrn** looked emotionally drained in his post-game conference, freely admitting that it "was the toughest game LA played all year long" and that "bend but don't break almost didn't work for Los Angeles this time."

In the face of a relentless and brazen attack by Brees and his receivers, the Knights' defence certainly looked beatable at times, but at the most important moments it closed the gap and turned away the league's most dynamic passing attack. Had there been no Undertakers' turnovers, we would be looking at a very different outcome right now. However, the turnovers happened and they were no accident. It took several plays and a few tactical losses to gain the measure of the Death Valley offence, but when they finally figured it out, it was just a matter of time before the famous 'Blue Shield' defence prevailed over a one-dimensional offence that had obviously abandoned the running game.

So, the bendable 'Blue Shield' ended up bouncing back with equal force upon its opponent. Since its inception, the L.A. franchise and its fans have been so focused on seeing the game through the lens of the defence that games like this, with over 30 points scored against them, seem like losses. But even though the LA offence played its role to perfection, with **Josh Freeman** completing 17 of 20 passes and **Jamaal Charles** running it into the end zone twice after turnovers, L.A. purists can relax knowing that it was the defence that made the difference in this game with its big plays, putting their team one step away from the ultimate prize.

### A FUNNY THING HAPPENED ON THE WAY TO THE COLISEUM....NOT!

The funny thing is how serious everybody around the Gladiators is behaving these days. Nobody is allowed to do anything except sit in the film room, go home, eat, and sleep. **Dave Birdsell** is so worried about injuries, that he has forbidden all activities for his players – even practice. In order to gain a day of rest for his team he actually petitioned the league for an 8-day work week calendar, which was rejected on the basis of the earth's orbit and rotation.

Durham owner, **George Kaldis** is uptight about everything around his team these days, not just injuries. According to my sources inside the Thunder Lizards, the game plan for the Can-Am Conference Final was changed, reworked, tweaked and re-issued to the players eight times over the week leading up to the game. When it arrived for the final time, mottled



**Vince Young** stands calmly in the pocket looking for a receiver in the Can-Am Conference Championship Game against Durham. Young threw for 201 yards and a touchdown and, most importantly, made no mistakes in leading the Gladiators to a 24-10 victory to advance to the final.

with whiteout and several colours of “sharpie” ink marking up the diagrams, even **Tim Tebow** reportedly blurted out, “Jesus Christ, now I have *no* clue what I’m doing!”

When game time finally arrived, it was the grimmest pair of opposing sidelines you are ever likely to see – not a smile to be found; except for **Leodis McKelvin**, who everyone agrees is in his own little world most of the time.

The game itself mirrored the moods of the coaches. It was one serious contest, with very little, or no drama. The Gladiators signalled early that they intended to run the ball against a Durham front seven that had shown vulnerability to the ground game through the regular season and the first round of the playoffs. There was not much the Lizards could do about it and when they made a concerted effort to stuff **Ahmad Bradshaw**, **Vince Young** took advantage.

I admit that I questioned Young’s maturity and was sceptical that he would be able to handle the pressure of the playoffs; but the Glads’ game

plan was adroitly designed to keep the pressure off Young and highlight his main redeeming feature – the one that got him the starting job over seasoned **Ben Roethlisberger** – his ability to hang on to the ball. Young has turned the ball over just twice in 6 starts and one relief appearance, and this had made all the difference to Gwinnett’s fortunes.

The Thunder Lizards signalled early that no matter what they tried, it wasn’t going to work. It did not take long for Kaldis to abandon the running game, which he admitted afterwards he had no intention of pursuing beyond a token gesture. The Gladiators seemed to know this and sat in nickel and dime packages for most of the afternoon and dared **Philip Rivers** to throw the ball. He did, inaccurately; as did **Tim Tebow** and emergency quarterback **John Skelton**, who each had a turn trying to find **Dwayne Bowe** in a sea of black jerseys. Skelton won the prize by connecting with Bowe for Durham’s only touchdown, a 47-yard sideline toss to the hole in the Gladiator zone with a little more than two minutes remaining in the game.

Although Gladiators fans, especially the “Plebes” in the end zone bleachers, were having a raucous time – thoroughly enjoying their team’s dominance of their opponent and basking in the thrill of victory after so many trying seasons behind Florida, Pickering and this very Durham team – the rest of the football world struggled to stay focused on a contest that only a student of the game could really appreciate. It was a tactical masterpiece from a Gwinnett coaching perspective, but there were not many exciting moments for the fan. One of the few came early in the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter, with the Gladiators leading 24-3 and Kaldis all but conceding the game by inserting Skelton into the game. Ironically, it was the happy and clueless McKelvin who made the play, jumping a short slant intended for Bowe. However, with an open field in front of him and the cheering crowd leaping to its feet, McKelvin tripped over his own feet and went down after stumbling a mere 5 yards. It was a needed bit of comic relief that, with a 21-point lead, Gladiators fans could afford a chuckle over as they celebrated their first trip to the EFL’s biggest game.

### **OF PIRATES AND KINGS**

In a press conference in Canton on Wednesday, EFL spokesman Cogswell Cogs II announced the awarding of two more expansion franchises for the 2012 season. The **Mission Viejo Monarchs** and the **Sebastien Swordfish** will join the **Commonwealth Colonials** and the **Twin Cities Triumph** in the league’s second expansion.

The selection of Sebastien, a modest city of approximately 20,000 on the east coast of Florida, appears to have been a politically strategic move to quickly return a team to the aggrieved football fans of that State, who are still angry about the relocation of the Dragons to Scarborough. It will be a few years at least before the Swordfish will be able to match the Dragons’ dominance, but the return of professional football to Florida is seen by the league as a critical step toward healing wounds opened up by the late pre-season debacle involving former owner, **Jim Heaton**.

Mission Viejo is a California city of more than 90,000 located 50 miles south of Los Angeles. Adding another west coast team solidifies EFL exposure in that media-rich environment but creates a market share conflict with the Knights that the league plans to resolve by promoting the Monarchs in San Diego, which is about 75 miles to the south.



**SEBASTIEN  
SWORDFISH**



**MISSION VIEJO  
MONARCHS**

The EFL unveiled the logos for the two newest expansion franchises at a press conference in Canton this week. The **Sebastien Swordfish**, owned by **Russ Lemmon** and the **Mission Viejo Monarchs**, owned by **Chris Ferraro**, round off a 20-team league for the 2012 regular season.

The owner of the Swordfish, **Russ Lemmon**, is very well-known on Florida's Treasure Coast as an expert 'Sand Assessor,' local historian, and amateur sports fisherman. The son of a humble sand-seller, Lemmon learned all about sand at an early age and parlayed that knowledge into a comfortable living as a sand consultant for golf course designers, sandbox manufacturers, pool filter companies, and Saudi Arabian sheiks seeking high social status by importing their sand in a country with little else. However, when world sand prices took a dip around the time of Desert Storm, Lemmon started up a boat tour company to help make ends meet. Little did he know, at the time, that the depressed sand market would indirectly lead him to a billion dollar fortune.

'Treasure Coast Tours Inc.' struggled initially, but as Lemmon learned more about the history of the area he also learned to cross-reference

the last known positions of missing pirate and merchant ships with local tides to narrow his search for old shipwrecks. He had done this initially with the intention of attracting scuba divers to explore the sunken hulls. But he soon discovered that this historical information, when combined with his expert knowledge of local sand patterns and textures, yielded, with uncanny accuracy, the location of several dozen buried pirate treasures. The discovery and sale of these treasures, in turn, funded more shipwreck and treasure hunts. The next thing you know, old Russ is a millionaire; then a billionaire owner of a brand new EFL franchise.

The Monarchs are owned by **Chris Ferraro**, a commercial real estate developer whose father, a home-builder, made a substantial fortune building a large portion of Mission Viejo itself in the late 60s and early 70s. He is a shrewd businessman at the head of a strong and growing company that he has built through years of hard work. By all accounts he is level-headed and fair in his personal and business dealings. Popular within his inner circle, Ferraro appears like an average multi-multi-millionaire/billionaire. But he does possess one unique quality that apparently was pivotal in the EFL Directors' decision to award him a franchise. Ferraro claims, in all seriousness, to be the rightful King of Portugal.

#### **THE TALE OF KING JOE**

Ferraro's claim sounds off the wall, but the basis for this belief is a meticulously-constructed family tree and a collection of rare books that detail, according to Ferraro, the "hidden history" of Portugal. He claims descendency from "the first King of Portugal, unrecorded," **Joao Pedreiro**, or *Joe the Bricklayer*. Ferraro claims to possess a firsthand account, written in 1139 by a "bad monk" named Pablo, of a cock-fight between a gamecock named 'Pipo,' owned by Joao, and a prize-fighting cock named 'Juaninoto el Magnifico,' owned by **Alfonso I** of the House of Burgundy. In those days, the nobility would discreetly mingle with commoners at cock-pits and bawdy houses to get away from the screaming in the castle dungeons and the droning of the Priests. According to Pablo the Bad Monk's account, it was well-known that Alfonso was about to lead a movement to break away from the Kingdom of Leon and declare Portuguese independence. It had all been arranged with his cousin **Alfonso VII** of Leon, but the day had not yet arrived for the formal pronouncement.

As Alfonso drank dark wine at the edge of the pit and watched as 'Juaninoto el Magnifico' shredded opponents one after the other, winning bet after bet, he became bored. Finally he cried out, "*Is there no cock here stiff enough to beat my cock?*" (The preceding is the literal translation – today it would have been like saying, "is there any worthy competition here at all?")

That's when Joao Pedreiro, quite drunk and penniless after losing two of his birds already that night, yelled out, "*I have a stiff cock!*" (Once again, that is the literal translation – today one would say, "I challenge you!")

This challenge brought roars of laughter from the gallery as they gazed upon 'Pipo,' the runt; a bird that Joao had hoped to sell to a fool, or pluck and cook the next day. Alfonso looked at the bird with a mix of disdain and amusement then turned to Joao and said, "*You have a small and ugly cock! I will surely beat it!*" he spat (roughly translated from the medieval dialect we would say today, "that bird doesn't stand a chance!")

The bricklayer, made wily and bold by over-consumption, replied, "*How sure are you of that, my Lord?*" to which Alfonso replied, "*I am so cocksure, I wager my Kingdom on it!*"

A sudden quiet fell upon the crowd. Men died for crowns in those days, not roosters, but Alfonso was so caught up with



his own bravado (and having made the statement could not back away from it), that he pushed it further: *"If your cock is still erect when I am finished with it, I will make you and your descendants King, and I will take up a trade."* (translated: "if your bird survives, I will make you and your sons king and become a bricklayer myself")

Against the protests of one of his advisors, Alfonso went so far as to call up **Pablo the Bad Monk** from the crowd to craft a written agreement, detailing the conditions. The document, which **Chris Ferraro** claims to have stored under lock and key in a secret place, was written on the back of a wine merchant's ledger – it reportedly still bears Alfonso's elegant signature and Joao's smudgy 'X.'

Anyway, as you can probably guess by now, 'Pipo' went on to win the fight in a miraculous fluke. 'Pipo' was so overmatched and so terrified that the bird did not even try to fight. 'Juaninoto el Magnifico' came at 'Pipo' furiously and it looked like it would be over quickly, but the fear of death charged 'Pipo' with an intense cowardly energy that made him hard to catch, slash and peck to death. Time after time, the tiny roster evaded 'Juaninoto el Magnifico's' silver cockspurs. The feathers flew and the squawking grew but no blood appeared on the dusty floor. Finally, toward the end of



The Coat of Arms of the rightful King of Portugal depicts 'Pipo the Rooster' – according to **Chris Ferraro**, anyway.

the third round, 'Juaninoto el Magnifico' had 'Pipo' cornered and both birds knew it. The larger reared back and rushed airborne with full force upon the smaller. 'Pipo' ducked and, being a religious bird, offered a silent prayer the 'Great Cock in the Sky.' 'Juaninoto el Magnifico' landed with full force upon 'Pipo,' but his silver spurs missed their mark, becoming lodged instead in the soft wooden fencing that 'Pipo' had tried in vain to squeeze through in a last-ditch attempt to escape.

For a moment the crowd, anticipating the killing blow, cheered frenziedly as one (those who had been rooting for 'Pipo' abruptly switching sides to avoid offending the future King), but the sound of rooster agony did not come immediately. 'Juaninoto el Magnifico,' stuck in the fence, still had 'Pipo' pinned beneath him. In a blind panic, 'Pipo' hysterically pushed and thrashed at 'Juaninoto el Magnifico' in an attempt to get away. In the process, his rusty bronze spurs dug and tore into the underbelly of Alfonso's prize bird. The peal of death squawks filled the cock-pit, but as the onlookers realized that they were issuing from the beak of the favourite, an awkward and eerie silence settled like a dark cloud over the crowd.

The confounded and terrified umpire looked on as 'Pipo' finally emerged from underneath the convulsing frame of 'Juaninoto el Magnifico,' stained by the blood of the larger bird and missing part of his crown, but otherwise intact. His voice cracked as he made the feeble pronouncement that 'Pipo' was the winner, then he quickly turned to Alfonso and implored, *"Forgive me, my Liege."*

Joao Pedreiro leapt in the air and bellowed, *"I am KING! I am KING! Yyyeeesss!"* A few derelicts, seeing an opportunity to get in on the ground floor of a new dynasty, moved to Joao's corner; but the majority of the crowd wisely realized there would be no more cock-fighting that night and no point in staying around to witness the crime that was to follow.

**Pablo the Bad Monk**, being astute, decided it was time to go as well; but, being already implicated by his involvement in drawing up the document in which Alfonso had agreed to relinquish the Crown, tucked the scroll under his arm and snuck away, never to be seen in Portugal again – except for once, when he secretly delivered the agreement and his account of the circumstances, to Joao's son, Rodrigo a year later.

Meanwhile, back at the cock-pit, Joao's reign as King was brief. According to the official account from the city archives, the bricklayer, being drunk, rushed at Alfonso in an unprovoked assault and was cut down by one of his guards – a terrible and preventable tragedy.

**Alfonso I** went on to become the first official King of Portugal. Although the historical record is scant on the subject, he apparently spent considerable sums of gold trying in vain to track down **Pablo the Bad Monk**, who, rumour has it, escaped to the Vatican and later became **Pope Celestine II**, whose governance of the church lasted just 5 months and ended suddenly under mysterious circumstances. According to Ferraro, he has a copy of an unissued Papal Bull, signed by Celestine II in 1144, recognizing "the descendants of Joao Pedreiro as the rightful heirs to the Throne of Portugal." By then, of course, Joao's family had moved from their village and changed their surname to Ferraro.

This story had apparently greatly impressed the EFL Directors, many of whom would love to be Kings as well so that they could rule with absolute power, instead of just *nearly* absolute power. A claimant to a throne is the next best thing to being on the throne, and with the EFL striving to attract a higher quality of ownership, Ferraro and his tenuous claim on the Portuguese throne was good enough.

### **MVP SEARCH**

This week, members of the Affiliated Press (AP) will vote for the EFL's Offensive MVP and Defensive MVP. Unlike last year, when there was general consensus before the vote was even taken, this year there is no clear cut winner on either side of the

ball and considerable debate raging across the networks and in the magazines. From what I can cull from my extensive research, the following are the likely finalists in both categories:

#### **OFFENSIVE MVP**

**Josh Freeman (LAK)** - The first year starter for the Knights is the fashionable choice of several top national writers and **Russ Flont** of ESPN, who describes Freeman as "athletic, exciting, revolutionary and mature beyond his years - a real star who will dominate the league for years to come." Setting aside Flont's excessive exuberance, there is a sober case to be made for Freeman, whose athletic ability coupled with keen instincts helped drive the Knights' offence this year. His 3081 passing yards, 27 TD passes and 93.9 QB rating were impressive enough on their own; but his 545 yards on the ground and 7.3 rushing average distinguished him from other quarterbacks and kept the LA offence moving at times when, under the same circumstances last year, it would have stopped.

**Joe Flacco (COW)** - Supporters point no farther than his 4049 yards of passing, 31 TD passes and league-leading 102.4 QB rating to back their claim that Flacco was no ordinary Joe in 2011. But if those numbers are not enough, then leading Cowtown to the best record in the regular season and doing it with a questionable supporting cast should be. However, the Corn Kings' early exit from the playoffs, although not Flacco's fault, may influence those who are on the fence to go with the Championship-bound Freeman, or the next guy on my list.

**Drew Brees (DVU)** - The league's top passer in yards gained (4069), completions (373) and TD passes (36) led the Undertakers to a playoff berth and first round upset over the Patriots. His team finished last, or close to last, in all team rushing categories, meaning that Death Valley would not have moved the ball if not for Brees carrying the offence on his back. Certainly he got some help from **Andre Johnson**, but that was all the help he got.

**Mike Wallace (ICC)** - Although not my favourite choice, Wallace earns the right to be in the discussion as a result of his unprecedented yards-per-catch average: an incredible 26.2 in 59 receptions. Although ranked 26th in receptions, the Cubs' deep threat led the league in receiving yards with 1545. He also caught 9 TD passes. His performance kept Cubs' QB **Sam Bradford** from being dead last in QB rankings and contributed to his team's feeble entry into the playoffs. Detractors point out that he quieted down later in the season as teams prepared better for him.

**Arian Foster (ICC)** - The league's leading rusher with 1698 yards gets on the ballot because he is the league's leading rusher. Always a huge factor in the Cubs' offence, Foster's presence undoubtedly helped teammates **Mike Wallace**, **Larry Fitzgerald** and **Sam Bradford**. But toward the end of the season Foster looked tired, breaking the 100-yard rushing mark just once in the last 5 games. He was perhaps the most valuable player on his team, but in the end that team did not perform up to pre-season expectations.

**Joe Thomas (LAK)** - There is no question that the Knights' left tackle was the most valuable lineman in the league by far. The question is more of a philosophical one: can a player who never touches the ball be the most valuable player on any offence?

**Benny Clapp** answers "yes" to that question, as does Mrs. Thomas. I, however, think not.

**LeSean McCoy (GWG)** - In addition to 1149 yards and a 5.2 yard average rushing, the Gwinnett scat-back gained 541 yards receiving on 55 catches, for 1690 total yards. The dual threat he posed kept opposing defences guessing and made up for a lack of production from the tight end position; but he managed to find the end zone only 6 times, which was a disappointment.

**Santana Moss (COW)** - The minority opinion coming out of Cowtown is that Moss did more than anybody else to contribute to the success of **Joe Flacco** and the Cowtown offence this year. With 90 receptions for a 15.7 yard average and 17 touchdowns, it is a hard point to argue. Moss's consistency in the face of persistent double-teaming was one of the season's most impressive offensive achievements.

**Adrian Peterson (CHP)** - The runner-up for the rushing title two years running posted a career-high 1570 yards rushing and 14 touchdowns to lead the Patriots to an East Division title. Peterson looked dominant at times, but there were times when he looked very ordinary - even less than ordinary. He had one of his less than ordinary moments in his team's first round exit in the playoffs and that fact will lurk in the back of voters' minds, I'm sure.

Longshots who have received some attention are **Reggie Wayne (GWG)** for his 93 catches and 13 TDs, **Aaron Rodgers (SBE)** for 22 TD passes and 7 rushing TDs, **Peyton Manning (CHP)** because he's Peyton Manning, and **Chris Johnson (PIC)** for his 1404 yards rushing, and 16 TDs (15 rush, 1 rec). If you like Wayne for his numbers and impact then you must like Moss better. If Rodgers were truly the most valuable offensive player in the league you think he might have been able to make the playoffs with the supporting cast he had in Scarborough. If you think another season of raising false hopes in Charleswood is worthy of an MVP for the elder Manning, then go ahead and waste your vote. Finally, Johnson deserves some credit for allowing **Matt Cassel** to survive a full season at the helm of the Spartans but he, like Peterson, disappeared at times; so if you like a touch of Houdini in your running backs, Johnson is your man.

#### **DEFENSIVE MVP**

**Clay Matthews (DVU)** - This highly-hyped barbarian posted nice numbers, contributing in many areas with 8 sacks, 8 deflections, 2 interceptions (1 returned for a TD), 15 knockdowns and a forced fumble. Undoubtedly a force to be reckoned with and accounted for, Matthews nevertheless played on the statistically worst defence in the EFL and contributed little during

the Undertakers' playoff run. He deserves a vote or two in recognition of his intimidation factor, but I am still looking for the beef.

**Troy Polamalu (GWG)** - Gwinnett's star safety missed 3 games. Not coincidentally, the Gladiators were 0-3 in those games, losing to Death Valley, Pickering and South Carolina. He finished second in the league in interceptions with 5, was credited with 9 deflections, forced and recovered a fumble. More importantly, when he was in the game, the rest of the defence played better and opposing quarterbacks were less likely to challenge the secondary deep. As the undisputed leader on a championship-calibre defence he deserves serious consideration.

**Tramon Williams (COW)** - While analysts around the league grasp to explain the Corn Kings' top-ranked defence, those who followed the team regularly point to *Tramon Williams*. Facing opponents' top wide receivers every week, Williams held them to a 53.4% pass completion rate and a stingy 8.8 yards per catch. He gave up just 3 TD passes to 4 interceptions (1 returned for a TD), deflected 13 passes to lead the league, and forced a fumble. Opposing quarterbacks had a combined 60.6 passer rating targeting receivers covered by Williams. Only one receiver broke the 100-yard mark against him this year (105 yards by *Roddy White*) and in 8 of 16 games the longest pass play he surrendered was less than 10 yards. A true shutdown performance in the *Darrelle Revis* mold.

**Charles Woodson (LAK)** - In addition to his top-notch coverage abilities - 68.9 combined passer rating targeting receivers he covered - Woodson was all over the field, making 96 tackles and big plays (3 interceptions and 2 forced fumbles). He surrendered just 3 TDs while scoring 2 of his own returning picks the other way and finished second in interception return yardage with 138 yards. Along with the rest of the LA secondary he surrendered a few big plays in the second half of the season, which may lose him a vote or two.

**James Harrison (CHI)** - Ask linemen and quarterbacks around the league who the most intimidating defenders are and invariably they will include Harrison in the conversation. The league leader in sacks with 12, he also caused 13 knockdowns, deflected 11 passes (tied for 3rd) and intercepted one other, stuffed 9 runs, and forced a whopping 7 fumbles! He was the primary force behind the league's third-ranked defence and one of the reasons the Convicts stayed in the playoff hunt for as long as they did.

**Joe Haden (PIC)** - On a defence supposedly without stars, Haden sure played like one. He led the league in interceptions with 6 (returning one for a TD), deflected 8 passes, forced 2 fumbles, and supported the run defence with 91 tackles. Although 60% of passes directed his way were completed, he allowed just 3 TDs and held opposing QBs to a 69.4 passer rating while passing to their top wide receivers. His anonymity will hurt him at the ballot box.

**Robert Mathis (GWG)** - If there were a separate vote for Defensive Lineman of the Year, Mathis would certainly be a finalist, if not the outright winner. Leading the league in sacks until the final two weeks of the season, he finished with 10 sacks, 19 knockdowns, 5 deflections, 6 run stuffs and 2 forced fumbles. What sets him apart from most of the other pass rush specialists in the league was his impact against the run - he finished with 75 tackles. As fine as his season was, as long as many see him as the second-best defender on his team the chance he will be recognized as the best defender in the league is remote.

**Justin Tuck (SBE)** - Also in the running for top D-lineman, Tuck had a magnificent season that was over-shadowed by the scandal of his team's elimination from the playoffs. Like the Glads' *Robert Mathis*, Tuck contributed across the board with 7 sacks, 16 knockdowns, 5 deflections, 7 run stuffs, 3 forced fumbles and an impressive 75 tackles. Teams avoided running in his direction and targeted him first for double-teaming in passing situations. Despite all this, the Blue Eagles' defence bent a little too much this year, finishing 8th in the rankings, and this will hurt his chances.

**Ndamukong Suh (SBE)** - With a player like Suh plugging the middle of the line, it is a mystery how Scarborough surrendered a league-worst 4.6 yards per carry defending the run. The second-year phenom would appear to be blameless in that regard, finishing with 68 tackles, 10 run stuffs, 4 forced fumbles, and adding 9 sacks and 9 knockdowns breaking up the pocket from the middle. Although he did what he could and posted MVP-like numbers in the process, Suh will likely be punished by the voters for his team's historical choke. This may not be fair, but - hey! - life isn't fair - get over it!

Some long-shots who, at times, have been in the spotlight this year are: **Trent Cole (MAR)** for his 99 tackles and 15 run stuffs; **Ray Edwards (PIC)** for his 11 sacks, 22 knockdowns and 4 forced fumbles; **Jared Allen (DTL)** for his 10 sacks, 22 knockdowns and 3 forced fumbles; **Ray Lewis (DVU)** for his league-leading 149 tackles and the fact that people remember he was once a suspect in a homicide; and **Ed Reed (CHP)** because he is Ed Reed. Of the bunch, Cole is the most deserving of a write-in vote because he toiled without complaint on a dead-end Markham franchise, but because of that same fact he doesn't (and shouldn't) stand a chance to win it all. Edwards could dominate a game, but he was inconsistent and ultimately one-dimensional. Allen, although a more complete player, also vanished for long stretches as the Thunder Lizards stumbled into the playoffs.

#### **FEARLESS FINAL PREDICTION**

If I were writing the script for the season, I could not have picked a better match-up for the final game. Truly the best talent from each Conference will face off against each other in Charleswood two weeks from now. While other teams like Death Valley and Cowtown would have made for an interesting match, the most complete teams made it through, and that is good for the league. Picking a winner is difficult, but I have to go with the Knights - this is their year and has been from the start.



# BUG THE BOOKIE!

## JIMMY THE GEEK GIVES YOU HIS PICK FOR THE EFL CHAMPIONSHIP GAME

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### JIMMY'S CHAMPIONSHIP PICK

#### AT 'PATRIOT PLACE,' CHARLESWOOD

#### **GWINNETT (13-5) @ LOS ANGELES (15-3) (line – KNIGHTS by 2)**

**OVERVIEW:** These teams did not face each other during the regular season and have only met three times in five seasons. The Knights lead the historical series 2-1 and have never met the Gladiators in the playoffs. Gwinnett's defence was ranked 2<sup>nd</sup> overall during the regular season, finishing just ahead of LA's vaunted 'Blue Shield' in yards-per-game allowed, but two ranks behind them in points surrendered. The Glads' defence performed at a high level all season against both the run and the pass despite injury problems. The LA defence was vulnerable to big plays but otherwise made it tough going for opposing offences. Both offences can move the ball on the ground and through the air, but the Knights' offence under Josh Freeman has been more reliable – turning the ball over less than any other team and avoiding the sack. The Glads hope to be able to match the Knights in ball security with Vince Young at the controls over mistake-prone Ben Roethlisberger.

**WHEN GWINNETT HAS THE BALL:** The Gladiators will want to establish the run like they did against Durham in the Conference Championship; but the LA defensive line will offer a stiffer challenge. With center Mike Pouncey questionable, it is equally questionable that Gwinnett will want to test the middle of the Knights' line too often. At some point they will have to pass and when they do they will be counting on the play action and Young's scrambling ability to hold off the Knights' pass rush. The 'Blue Shield' will continue to be selective with the blitz and will be counting on their Pro Bowl corners to take away Young's targets long enough to force a throw-away or earn a coverage sack. If the Gladiators try to spread it out with multi-wide receiver sets the Knights may counter with an aggressive pass rush to protect a secondary that lacks depth after their top two.

**WHEN L.A. HAS THE BALL:** The Knights have the luxury of options when they have the ball. Look for them to mix in the run with the short passing game to move steadily up the field and take time off the clock. With Troy Polamalu patrolling center field and Asante Samuel shadowing Roddy White, Josh Freeman will want to surprise when taking a shot down field. The Gladiators could shut down the Knights' passing game by deploying nickel and dime packages as they did to great effect last week, but that would leave them vulnerable to the explosive Jamaal Charles. Expect the Gladiators to take a conservative approach in the beginning, with some calculated blitzes and double-coverages emerging in the game plan for the second half.

**HOW I SEE IT:** The Knights started the week as 3-point favourites and the line has since moved down as money flocks to Gwinnett. The casual fan assumes that the LA defence is the stronger one, but those who have been watching carefully believe that, when healthy, the Gladiators are not only more solid, but have more playmakers capable of turning the game around on a dime. It's a tough call between Troy Polamalu and Charles Woodson as to who is more likely to create a dramatic turning point, but I am not going to stake my reputation on that bet. I think that Gwinnett is in a tough spot here with Vince Young as their starter. He may be the reason Gwinnett is in the big game, but the spotlight of the final is a different kind of pressure. The 'Blue Shield' will create problems he has never seen before and his inexperience will quickly show. Will he get the hook fast enough to save the day? I am betting that he stays in for one series too long. **PICK: LOS ANGELES**