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EAST

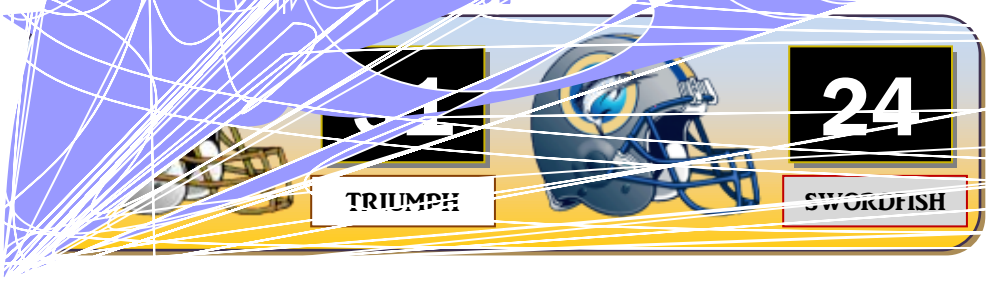
CENTRAL

WEST

NORTH

ATLANTIC

SOUTH



Triumph WR **Antonio Brown** celebrates after scoring the game-winning touchdown in the final triumph of the season. Twin Cities recovered from a slow start while the Swordfish offence struggled under back-up ***Jameis Winston*** in a game that went down to the wire. *(Full story inside)*



hat “The Fish” were the cream of – the team with the best chance to ruin Twin Cities’ bid for perfection and seize a ring.

gunned the Triumph and that it was Andy Dalton’s game to lose.

“We’re in the historic city of Canton. The build up has been incredible for Gale Sayers Ten,” began ESPN play **Phil Winterall.** “The two best teams in the league will battle it out in the birthplace of the EFL. How exciting! The Triumph ”

“Well, Phil, I don’t know how you can be better than 16 0,” replied ESPN colour **Bill Badden**. “And then you add those two wins that got ‘em here and you have....a....whole lot of wins without a loss. I don’t know how you can beat that. B rdfish are a good team. They kind of snuck up on the league this year but there is no doubt they deserve to be here today.”

“All week long we’ve talked about the weather and the condition of the field. It doesn’t look that bad out there today, but i lot colder than other championship games. Do you expect the weather to be a factor today, Bill?” Winterall asked.

“I was watching the warm ups, Phil, and the field looks pretty good,” Badden answered. “The Triumph used to play in cold ago and the Swordfish play in the North...which I don’t understood one bit...but my point is they play in some cold places. I don’t think it will matter to the players as long as they play with what got them here. If they start thinking abou eing cold they could get into a lot of trouble out there.”

A gathering of dignitaries unlike any other in history of the EFL’s big game crowded the center of the field as the head offi **Bill Vinovich** **Gale Sayers**. The *‘Kansas Comet’*

Bobby Wagner called “heads” and the coin landed heads to a burst of cheers from the Triumph supporters in the crowd. The ***LP Ladouceur***

oval ‘EFL’ logo. A league official approached and

“There’s a mistake. Sebastian, you won the coin toss,” Vinovich turned to Ladouceur. “This is not a joke. I’m afraid they read the wrong side.” Vinovich showed the coin to the captains and turned it back and forth. He was explaining something.

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“Have you ever seen anything like that before, Bill?” asked **Phil Winterall**

“I’m not sure what I just saw, Phil, so I’m not sure if I’ve seen it before or not,” replied **Bill Badden**. “Aren’t there just two sides to a coin? If one side is down and the other side is up and the guy reading it is standing over it, I don’t know how he

and said what was in his mind instead of what he was looking at.”

“There were problems with the coin toss last year. The call had to be reviewed,” noted Winterall.

“Yeah, and it was the right call on review, Phil,” Badden was quick to point out. “The league usually gets these things right the end. You’d like them to get the coin toss right the first time but that’s not always possible.”

d gradually began to disperse and the team’s confused head coaches retreated after having had

“A special coin was used on this occasion,” Vinovich stated in his most official voice. “The 10 Coin bearing the likeness of Gale Sayers on the ‘heads’ side and the EFL logo on the ‘tails’ side is a transparent crystal co nd landed properly with the ‘tails’ side facing up. However, in the bright light the official could see, and did read, the other side of the coin in error. This was corrected soon after. Sebastian therefore won the toss and elected to defer.”

“Okay.....no *know* I’ve never seen anything like that before, Phil,” Badden declared.

THE GAME

1st QUARTER (Sebastian 14, Twin Cities 0) –

– minute ad from '69 Lumber,' de

"Welcome back to Fawcett Stadium in Canton where it appears we are finally about to the get under way," announced, **Phil Winterall** "How did you feel about long delays when you were a coach, Bill?"

"Well, we didn't like them, Phil," **Bill Badden** replied. "The coaches, the players, the trainers, the fans, nobody likes somebody, take their head off...you know....get the blood flowing. When you have to wait, it's h your teammates to stay focused. This can get your players injured. As a coach you don't want that."

Adam Vinatieri

"What's this?" a startled Winterall exclaimed. "It looks like the Triumph have pu this, Bill?"

"Well, has developed a reputation as an aggressive coach who is prepared to do the unexpected," Badden explained. "An onside kick here to start the game would be unexpected....and Triumph coach Guy Williams knows this. So he's expecting the unexpected here and sending in the big bodies with the soft hands up front in anticipation of an onside kick."

Shane Vereen

"What do you know! He crossed him up with a squib kick there!" declared Winterall. "Do you get the feeling this is going to b ck coaches, Bill?"

"Well, I don't know about chess, Phil, but it's going to be a heck of a football game, that's for sure!" Badden blubbered in "Russ Lemmon did it again! He bamboozled his opponent by doing the unexpected. Everyone was expecti – *squib* Triumph are known to be not all that great on kick returns."

"Vereen's longest kick return this year was 27 yards, Bill," Winterall noted.

"He's not a threat to take it back all the way, that's for sure!" Badden added. "But Russ Lemmon made sure of that by faking kick then squibbing it. I can't wait to see what else these two coaches have up their sleeves this afternoon!"

Doug Martin

Delvin Breaux ***Antonio Brown***

"What does Delvin Breaux have to do today to try and limit or stop Antonio Brown, Bill?" Winterall made conversation as the Triumph

"Well, he's going to need help, Phil, pure and simple," Badden answered flatly. "The only corner to hold off Brown all year w underneath. Brown is the best weapon the Triumph have, probably the best weapon in the league, and you're not go one."

Carson Palmer

Jerry Attaochu

"And they start with a run to Martin for about two yards. Are you at all surprised that they didn't go t Perhaps to send a message?" Winterall asked as the teams regrouped on the field for second down.

"Not at all surprised, Phil," Badden replied. "You could see the Swordfish had Brown double ople don't realize that Doug Martin won the rushing title this year. There wasn't much hullabaloo about it because everyone was talking Martin was a big part of Brown's success this year. Heck, he's what they call one of them dark sheep contenders for offensive MVP."

Denzel Perryman

"And we have our first penalty of the game on just the second play of the game," announced Winterall.

"Ah, the rookie looked a little anxious on that play, Phil!" Badden added. "You wanna see that kind of aggression in your young players in a game like this, but you kinda hope the ref doesn't see it."

Carlos Dunlap

Rishard Matthews ***Sharrif Floyd***

"It looked like Palmer didn't stand a chance on that play, Bill," Winterall observed as the Triumph punting unit came onto th

"No he didn't, Phil! Floyd just plows over the center Kraig Urbik," Badden enthused while watching the replay. "Look, he just gobberstomps him and bats the ball out before Carson Palmer even gets set. It's a good thing too, because the Swordfish were underneath and both Brown and Clay were open down field."

Chris Jones ***Danny Amendola***

"And here comes the 'Red Rifle' for his first shot at the Triumph defence this afternoon," Winterall announced as ***Andy Dalton*** Swordfish offence onto the field. "Dalton led all quarterbacks in passer rating this year but struggled to stay healthy."

"Yeah, he was held to just under 300 attempts, Phil," added Badden. "But, you know, that Jameis Winston kid looked pretty good in relief too. I guess that's what happens when you have the weapons the Swordfish have and you have Marshall Yanda on your offe

ouchdowns when you're in a situation like that. Heck, I could probably throw a touchdown pass behind that offensive line!"

"Have you ever thrown a touchdown pass before, Bill?" Winterall chuckled.

"Once, in High School I was playing tight end," Badden giggled. "We had an option play to the tight end and I just heaved it up in the

those too?"

"Dalton and Winston combi – still not as many as Carson Palmer," Winterall stated as the Swordfish lined up.

Odell Beckham Jr

CJ Anderson

Dough Baldwin

"Dalton doesn't look like he's backing down from those Triumph corners, Bill," Winterall said as the referee placed the ball at the 50

"Yeah, he's going right after them, Phil," Badden concurred. "But, you know....that's Russ Lemmon's style of coaching right t

fish were struggling all those years everyone said that you couldn't get a handle on him as a coach because he didn't have an work with. Well, now he has something to work with and he's like...bam...boom...zap...going right after everyone out there!"

Justin Forsett

William Gholston

Jerrell Freeman

"And Dalton is dumped! William Gholston with the sack!" play **Phil Winterall**

"Gholston plays the old middle guard posi 2 set the Triumph like to use," colour commentator, **Bill Badden** authoritatively. "That would be like a nose tackle, but in the center of a five man defensive line. It's an old formation that hasn't really been used

ional football since the 1950's, but the Triumph use it as their base defence. The league still hasn't figured it out. Heck,

e and the guard failed to pick up Gholston."

"

.no

is still on the field," Winterall exclaimed. "If they are really going for it, it's a pretty gutsy move. Do you agree with a gamble here, Bill?"

"Well this is vintage Russ Lemmon here, Phil," Badden answered. "He's going to take these types of chances. He's been doing i year. I think it's a little too early for this myself. If they make the first down they make the first down. If they don't, they don't and Carson Palmer gets the ball in great field position with that explosive offence. But, heck, it's football! It's the game we play here in America!"

"And Danny Amendola has the first down! He looked pretty open on that play, Bill," Wint

"That was the right call to go for it in that situation, Phil!" Badden quickly pointed out. "You have Danny Amendola, a veter corner Byron Maxwell, who's only playing his second snap of the game. He does a little jiggy move a

the ball out quickly to him for an easy first down. Sometimes this game is really just that simple!"

"Well, they aren't even thinking about it here. They're going for it on 4 & 1. Do you agree with this decision, Bill?" Winterall asked.

"Heck, I agree with whatever works, Phil!" Badden chortled. "But you have Adam Vinatieri on your team, a veteran kicker who isn't

ence."

Russ Lemmon

"Great call in that situation, Phil!" Badden gushed. "The Triumph got caught in their dime package and the Swordfish went sma mouth at 'em with Justin Forsett and...bongo...first down! It's a simple game really, when you think about it!"

Ziggy

Ansah ***Ryan Schraeder*** ***Justin Pugh***

"Oh no, this looks bad, Bill. Dalton is down. The officials have called an injury timeout here," Winterall declared gravely.

"You just hate to see that," Badden filled in after a long pause as the replay ran in slow motion on the screen. "Dalton twis

y Ansah falls on him. That's just really unfortunate there. It's a good football play by the defender and a good play by the quarterback. But sometimes two rights make a wrong, Phil. Looks like they're going to have to assist Dalton off the field."

"Jameis Winston is warming up on the sideline, Bill," Winterall commented as the camera turned to the Swordfish back up QB. "He's used to this situation. He played in 11 games this year and saw considerable action in relief of Andy Dalton."

"Well, normally I'd be worried right now if I were the Swordfish, Phil," Badden said. "But Winston did a great job this year when he was

have

ups go."



Swordfish quarterback ***Andy Dalton*** is carted off the field holding his knee during first quarter action. Dalton was injured at the js i %k%nj%fr j x%ujning drive and never returned. The early loss of Dalton meant ***Jameis Winston*** played most of the game.

CJ Anderson ***Morgan Moses***

"I know it wasn't easy, but the Swordfish made it look pretty easy on that drive, Bill," Winterall commented as Vinatieri gauged the wind

"It wasn't easy at all, Phil," Badden replied. "It certainly wasn't easy for Odell Beckham. He didn't catch a ball on that dr that's thing. And that's the thing about the Swordfish – n a lot of ways."

"The Triumph look really concerned about the onside kick, Bill. Do you think that concern is warranted?" Winterall asked as the Triumph

"Absolutely, Phil! You don't want your opponent to have a free shot at you," Badden answered with conviction. "Remember, Russ Lemmon can be tricky and a little crazy. You don't expect a team to risk an onside kick this early in the game, especially after they've scored and – that would be crazy! And that's exactly why Guy Williams expected an onside kick there. It's just crazy enough that he banked on Guy Williams thinking he'd be crazy enough to try it, and again he did the one thing nobody expected or would th – a second squib kick to Shane Vereen."

"Well, with the 3 touchdown," Winterall continued with the play

Aaron Colvin ***Paul Posluszny***

Jameis Winston ***Clive Walford***

Da'Norris Searcy,

Justin Forsett



Justin Forsett kqfxmjx%mx%bKQ% jjp%65%Xfqzyj%t%Xjwrhj %qt jx% fkyjw%ht wns l%Xjgfxyrfs x%xjhts i%1 %s%ymj%kwxy%zfwyjw%k%b X 3%

"Justin Forsett with the big run and the Swordfish have their second touchdown!" Winterall bla

"It's bad enough for a defence to have to deal with CJ deal with this guy!" Badden chortled as Forsett bounded back to the sideline. "Twin Cities is in danger of letting things get away Like...we're seldom misses a tackle just getting run over. You don't see that too often."

Guy Williams

2nd QUARTER (Sebastian 14, Twin Cities 7) –

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"And Winston comes onto the field for the Swordfish. His team has a chance to really put the Triumph on their heels if he can to a score here," Winterall said dryly. Nobody in the broadcast industry wanted a blowout in Gale Sayers 10 and Winterall's deadpan delivery said

"Well, the Triumph need to make a stop," added Badden gravely. "If they give up a score here they'll fall further behind."

Kenny Clark

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"The Triumph got the stop they needed, Bill," declared Winterall, sounding a little more upbeat.

"That wasn't a good series for the Swordfish on offence," observed Badden. "Winston is trying to get Beckham the ball but he

f a bit, Phil."

"And here comes the Swordfish punter, Jordan Berry," said Winterall. "No punter has seen less action than Berry this year. That's a testament to the Swordfish offence."

"Well Russ Lemmon hates to punt, Phil," Badden elaborated. "He spent most of his first four seasons in the

down and all. But he doesn't want to throw away his team's advantage here by giving the Triumph a short field. He's going to send them backwards and trust his defence to make a stop."

Jordan Berry ***Antonio Brown*** ***Arik Armstead***

Palmer didn't wait to take his shot. On the first play he caught the Swordfish in a run defence and found ***Charles Clay***

Guy Williams

"Do you punt it here or go for the field goal, Bill?" aske

"Well...if you're Guy Williams you don't do either of those things, Phil. You go for it on 4 and 12!" Badden answered excitedly as

"What do you know! It's complete to Antonio Brown for a first down!" Winteral

"That's what MVPs do, Phil!" Badden interjected. "They make the big plays...and that was a humogenous play for the Triumph!"

"Touchdown, Doug Martin!" cried Winterall. "And we have a ball game here in the second quarter!"

"That drive was like the Coyote and the Roadrunner, Phil!" Badden blubbered as the Triumph fans roared in the background and on the screen. "The Tri

beep beep!> and scoots through that gap to the end zone!"

Adam Vinatieri

"The Swordfish looked to have something going there, Bill. But they end up missing a long field goal and now the Triumph have od shot at tying this game before the half," Winterall said animatedly. The gas seemed to be escaping the Sebastian balloon a

"Well, Jameis Winston is struggling with his secondary reads, Phil," Badden observed soberly. "He locks in on Beckham and the Triumph are letting him know that he's not going to get any free shots at Beckham. Winston is looking a little big eyed right now, Phil. He's got e big saucer eyes that are easy to read. He's got to calm down and remember what he did during the regular season. He was a b the Swordfish finished at the top of their conference."

Chandler Jones

"Guy Williams took a bigger gamble on 4 & 12 the last time, Bill. Do you go for it here, or attempt the long field goal?" Winterall asked.

"Well, you have to come away with points here if you're the Triumph, Phil," Badden replied sagely. "They made Robert Aguayo their fourth round pick for this very reason. I think you have to give him a shot put his team into double digits."

"And Brown has the first down!" Winterall cried. "Another gamble by the Triumph pays off."

"Great call in that situation, Phil," Badden enthused. "You have a long shot at the field goal; t might as well go to the guy who's been doing it all year for you. That's great concentration by Brown to hold onto the ball t coming at him. He's got help over the top so he knows he can go for But Brown just kind of goes with it, hangs on, gets up, does that pointing thing they do when it's a first down and the Triumph are in good shape."

"Given what we've seen from these coaches, Bill, do you think Guy Williams should go for it here?" Winterall asked.

"I don't think so, Phil," Badden answered thoughtfully. "You basically have a chip shot field goal here and you'd think that h...it looks like Aguayo is coming onto the field here. I think this is the right call."

Kraig Urbik ***Chris Jones***

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"And Aguayo misses wide right!" Winterall cried. "That's got to hurt, Bill."

"Well I have to question the decision to try the field goal here, Phil," Badden intoned solemnly. "You're two for two on fourth downs, both of those longer than this one and you have a shot at tying this game before half time. It's a strange time to lose your nerve when you're in a ng chicken with another maniac coach on the other side. I think Guy Williams was the first to go <bawk! bawk!> here."

Kenneth Dixon

Russ Lemmon

"What do you do here, Bill? You're out of field goal range and out of timeouts," Winterall laid out the scenario.

"Well, I don't think Russ Lemmon expected Kenneth Dix plus yards there. Suddenly his team is in Twin Cities' territory with a chance to get into scoring position but now he has hardly any time left," Badden answered. "He could take a shot or go ds before the clock runs out. Myself, I'd do both; look deep to your primary and if he's not open look for your secondary near the sidelines. But I don't know if Russ Lemmon has the confidence in his quarterback to execute a play like that."

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Ziggy Ansah

"Looks like Ansah arrived late, Bill," Winterall

"He did, Phil," Badden concurred. "But when you have 275 pounds of muscle bursting to get loose and you have that quarterback your sights it's really hard to stop yourself. Ziggy Ansah – love that name, "Ziggy" – he's been zigzagging around linemen to get to the quarterback all year. That's what he does – call there!"

down gamble. It was now anybody's game.

3rd QUARTER (Sebastian 17, Twin Cities 14) –

"We're back and ready for the second half of football here on a crisp, cold night in Canton," Winterall announced. "But the c
n. How do you think the players are going to feel after such a long break, Bill?"

"The ones who can stay focused will be itching to get out there and hit somebody. But the ones who kind a take it easy, you k around, you know, they're going to be slower getting back into it," Badden explained. "This is where the coach comes in, Phil. It's the coach's job to keep the players focused. And that's where I think both these coaches have excelled this year. It should be a great second half."

Aguayo's kic

"He goes deep, looking for Baldwin....and the ball is knocked away at the last second by Darius Slay!" Winterall exclaimed. "
e was hit after the throw...and it was Ansah again."

"Well, I'm not sure what Winston saw there but he changed the play at the line and took a shot downfield," Badden commented. "Nice

with that right away or you're going to have quarterback stew on the field."

"The Swordfish don't have a third quarterback on the roster, Bill," noted Winterall. "What do you do when you run out of quarterbacks?"

"When you run out of quarterbacks you do a lot of running, Phil," Badden answered. "They have Danny Amendola for emergencies,

ce with the third team."

Johnthan Banks

"And the personal foul will bring the ball into Twin Cities territory," announced Winterall. "You know, Bill, that was just Jameis Winston's second complete pass of the game. He's now 2 of 10 for 20 yards."

"Well, he hasn't been very accurate, that's for sure, Phil," Badden weighed in. "He's looking like he's throwing a little scared.
he's afraid to make a mistake. The Triumph corners are doing a good job staying with their man but there's been opportunities, he just hasn't seen them."

Benjamin Watson

Russ Lemmon

"Well, I don't normally have to ask this question so often, but these are two coaches who don't always follow the
down here if you're Russ Lemmon, Bill?" Winterall asked.

"If I'm Russ Lemmon, I go for it, Phil," Badden declared firmly. "If I am Russ Lemmon, I'd look at it like, if I can't get two yards when I



Charles Clay fx%ts j%tl%ymj%zs xzs l%mjwt jx%tl%LX% 3% Mjwj%mj%nx%htwsl%mnx%yjfr x%xjhtsi%tI %s%f%6; -yard 3rd quarter TD pass. He finished with 7 catches and 119 yards.

need them, I don't deserve to win the game. So I go for it here, if I'm Russ Lemmon."

Adam Vinatieri

"And Vinatieri makes it easily. He delivers to make it 17 7 for the Swordfish," Winterall announced.

"Well, it's important to get that two score lead in a game like this, Phil," Badden joined in. "You don't want to miss a shot at points when you're in your opponent's red zone. I like the call to kick it here, especially when your quarterback can't hit the broad side of a barn right now."

indicating Guy Williams' continuing concern that the Swordfish would attempt to catch them by surprise. But deployment of the

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Jameis Winston

"Antonio Brown makes the catch and is brought down right away by Breaux just shy of the 20!" Winterall cried. "Wow! Even when he's not wide open Brown makes plays, Bill."

"You're right, Phil!" Badden. "On the replay we can see that Delvin Breaux is with him step t if it is off target. But Palmer delivers a strike and Brown focuses like a pro and makes the catch. Breaux's doing a good job but he needs help. His nickname isn't Breaux Island, you know. I don't know what his nickname is, but I know it's *not* and."

Charles Clay
Walter Thurmond

"And Clay will find the end zon – touchdown Triumph!" Winterall cried. "Well, that didn't take very long, Bill."

"The Sebastian defence was really off balance on that drive, Phil," Badden remarked earnestly. "They didn't know what was com

Lemmon has to find a way to shut down Antonio Brown or else this game will slip away from them."

"Sebastian can't seem to get anything going through the air, Bill," Winterall noted dryly.

"They tried get
he was breaking and it sailed out of bounds," Badden commented. "You know, the Triumph have basically used the same defense a hey aren't attempting to fool anybody, but it seems to be confusing the young Swordfish quarterback, Phil."

"Palmer is just carving them up, Bill," Winterall stated as the Triumph quarterback listened on his headset for the play from sidelines. "He's spreading the ball around and getting time to throw."

"Well...one of the concerns the Triumph had coming in
defensive ends, Carlos Dunlap and Chandler Jones," Badden added. "Those two haven't been pinning their ears back and going af ence Final. And that's because the Swordfish are concerned about Doug Martin. They don't want to lose containment on the outside and that's one of the reasons Palmer has time to throw."

"I know it sounds crazy, but do you think it may have crossed Guy Williams' mind here to go for it on fourth down and 11, Bill?"

"I don't think so, Phil," Badden guffawed. "You have a chance to tie the game here with a makeable field goal. This is the right call."



Sebastian coach **Russ Lemmon** tries to calm down ***Odell Beckham Jr.*** between series. The temperamental wide receiver was steadily frustrated by double teams.

"And he *missed* it!" exclaimed Winterall. "The 34

e Swordfish hang on to their lead."

"He just flat out missed that one, Phil," Badden observed. "Last time the snap was high

know....Aguayo hasn't attempted many field

all....he's pressing a little."

"Aguayo attempted just 10 field goals

the game. His longest was 30 yards," Winterall

"It makes you wonder if maybe Guy

there, Phil," Badden opined. "You have a young

instead....just saying."

"That's 7 catches for Brown, Bill," Winterall stated. "He's already over one hundred yards on the day and we still have one m play."

"The Triumph look like they know what they're doing, Phil," Badden observed. "They are going right after this Swordfish defen kinds of different plays. They'll keep throwing to Brown until Sebastian figures out how to stop him or slow him down."

"Well, that's the end of the third quarter," announced Winterall. "We're going to break for a commercial now, but stay tuned because you aren't going to want to miss one play of what is going to be an exciting finale, coming up!"

4th QUARTER (Twin Cities 31, Sebastian 24) –

"Clay has another first down. That's his 6 catch of the game and that puts him over 100 yards on the day. He's having a nice game, Bill,"

"He's getting chances to show what he can do and he can do a lot," Badden replied. "They made him a big part of the game plan

this afternoon. I don't know if it's one of them double thinks; where...you know....you think the other guy thinks you're going to do something, so you don't do that thing and do the thing you think the other guy is going to do because he thinks you're going to do the other thing....or it could be that

you don't do that thing the other guy expects you to do to get him to do the thing you don't want him to do later when you're ready to do the thing he expected you to do at the beginning but didn't do and now thinks he can do it and get away with it. I guess we won't know if that's the case until later in the game, but for right now it's hurting the Swordfish and helping the Triumph get back in this game."

While Badden was trying to analyze Russ Lemmon's coaching strategy, Martin was stopped after a 2

Tyler Eifert

"Tyler Eifert has the first down inside the Sebastian red zone!" Winterall called. "Tyler – that's a name we haven't called very much today, Bill."

"What a time to go Eifert!" Badden burst. "He really hasn't done much all game and the Swordfish weren't paying any attention momentum carried him through the grasp of Patrick Chung and on to the first down. I'm telling you, Palmer is getting everybody involved and it's giving the Swordfish fits."

On the next play the Swordfish appeared to think that it was now Martin's turn to

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"Touchdown, Antonio Brown!" intoned Winterall, emphasizing the rhyme of *down Brown*. "It felt like it was just a matter of time, Bill!"

"Well, it was a matter of time, Phil!" Badden agreed. "It took him three quarters and Antonio Brown to finally score. But, you know, he's been a big part of this Triumph offence all game. Now he gets a touchdown s now!"

the kick landed in Amendola's arms near the back of the end zone. He wisely took a knee and the Swordfi

"It will be interesting to see how the Swordfish respond to being behind for the first time in this game, Bill," Winterall ma

"Maybe this is what they need, Phil," Badden replied sagely. "Jameis Winston hasn't been able to do much with the lead. We'll see what Russ Lemmon has up his sleeve here to get his quarterback into the game."

CJ Anderson

"Complete to Beckham. He's brought dow field," Winterall called the action. "And that's Beckham's first catch of the game, Bill! Are you surprised he hasn't been more of a factor today?"

"Well, of course you expect a player like Beckham to make more of an impact, but I'm not that surprised, Phil," Badden answered. "The covering him all day and that's the first time Winston has laid a pass in there he could catch. What surprises me is the determination of Twin Cities' coach Guy Williams to take Beckham out of the game and how the Swordfish haven't been able to get much going with guys like Baldwin and Anderson out there."

"Touchdown, Sebastian!" Winterall exclaimed. "Doug Baldwin with a nice play there regains the lead for his team!"

"Darius Slay has been doing a great job on Baldwin all day, Phil," Badden remarked as the score replayed in slow motion on the screen. "But on this play he buys Baldwin's fake and takes a little step outside and that was enough to gain separation. Baldwin cuts

can catch him now. That's a play right there."

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Isa Abdul-Quddus

"Do you think Russ Lemmon might have flirted with the idea of an onside kick there, Bill?" Winterall asked.

"No way, Phil!" Badden chuckled. "Russ Lemmon might be crazy but he's not insane!"

Bill Badden

"Brown has it....and Bre yard gain!" Winterall droned as he called the action. "It looked like Brown might get away there, Bill. Delvin Breaux made a nice play to save a touchdown."

"The Swordfish were gambling on Martin again, Phil," Badden remarked grimly. "I think at this point in the game you let Martin try to l think that's his 20 catch of the game, Phil!"

"It's actually hi catch, Bill," Winterall sniggered. "But who's counting."

"It feels like 20, Phil," Badden chortled.

Joel Bitonio
Oday Aboushi

"This is a big loss for the Triumph," offered Badden, unprompted by his partner. "That line is doing a pretty good job so far and Bitonio's been one of the reasons for that. Okay Aboki comes in to replace him and he really is a bit of an unknown."

"Oday Aboushi," Winterall interjected, correcting the pronunciation, "He appeared in 7 regul injury issues as well. We'll see how he does here."

Carlos Dunlap

"And this will bring the punting unit onto the field," Winterall began. "No! Guy Williams has sent his offence back onto the field! Can you believe this?"

"With these two coaches, I'm ready to believe anything, Phil!" Badden laughed. "Now, do I agree with it? 4 when you still have 5 minutes left in the game. There's a big difference between 14 yards and say, 9 or 10 yards. A lot can g 14 yards. I'd be trying to pin them back inside their 20."

Austin



Antonio Brown indicates a first down after picking up 18 yards on 4th & 14 in 4th vzf wyjwfhyrts 3Xr j%zsi ryxfwj%fqrsl%%yyj%zwrsl%trsy%k%X% 3

Johnson

"Brown has it at the 26! And he's brought Triumph!" Winterall yelled.

"Unbelievable!" Badden joined in. "I know I unbelievable!" As the play replayed on the s Badden continued: "Great poise in the pocket by *guess-who*! But what's really

send both corners on the blitz there! That's one heck of a surprise! I'd bet my motor home that nobody saw that know I didn't! The last thing I would have

...<*heh!*> <*heh!*>....I didn't expect Guy Williams to go

coaching at another level, Phil!"

"Well, that was payback for the last play," Badden observed. "Delvin Breaux wasn't going to let

agreed with him. Heck, that's football! That's the game we play here in America!"



Jameis Winston vents his frustration after leading his team to a three-and-out with 2:18 remaining in a tie game. It was a tough outing for the young QB.

and 11 Palmer's pass for Brown sailed a little high as he tried to place it past the corner Breaux and it fell

"I have to ask you, Bill. Do you tempt fate and go for it here?" Winterall asked. Everything was now on the table as an optio

"Guy Williams has been daring the Devil all day, Phil," Badden replied. "I don't know why he would stop now. But ser

with three minutes left. You know...it's crazy....but I think he should go for it here! It's just that kind of game."

"Well it looks like Guy Williams is going to bet on his young kicker, Bill," Winterall declared.

"And that's the right call there, Phil," Badden eagerly concurred. "At some point you have to trust your fourth roun
kick in a pressure situation."

"And the kick is down the middle! We have a tie game," shouted Winterall as Triumph fans bellowed and wav

"This is the way it should be in a 10 anniversary championship!" Badden gushed. "A tie game with 3 minutes left to play. It doesn't get

taped up body parts too! Then we'd know we're watching a real football game, the kind we play here in America!"

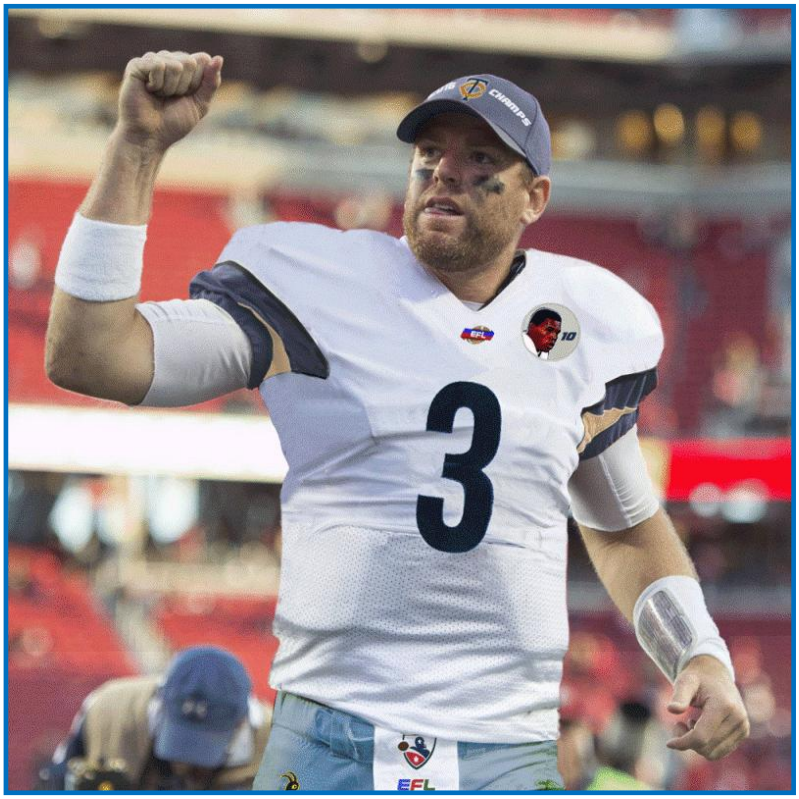
Jameis Winston

Jurrell Casey

"And Casey sacks him!" Winterall barked. "That's not how the Swordfish wanted to start the drive, Bill."

"Winston's lucky he didn't lose the ball on that play, Phil!" Badden added. "Casey comes in unblocked and <*blamm-o!*>
him. That's a sack, Phil. That's a real sack by a real lineman! When they came up with that word, 'sack,' that is what they were talking about!"

Brandon Coleman



Carson Palmer l n j x% nfy x%qj k%l%kymj%t xy-game Fawcett Stadium crowd one final fist pump as he walks toward the tunnel. Palmer was the steady hand behind the win, passing for 421 yards and 3 TDs.

"And the throw to Coleman is low –

ere," Winterall opined.

"Well, it would be the craziest gamble of the year if Russ Lemmon kept his offence on the field here, Phil," Badden chortled. "And it looks like he's going to send out the punter, so *<heh!> <heh!>"*

"Palmer throws a strike to Matthews – first down!" Winterall cried. "And that will bring up the two minute warning."

"The Swordfish had Rishard Matthews double on that play, Phil, but Palmer goes to him anyway," Ba observed. "That was a perfect pass and a great job of hanging

eeps passing the ball like this and his line keeps holding up, it won't matter what the Swordfish do!"

"The Swordfish use their final timeout," Winterall announced. "Time is definitely a factor now, Bill, with 1:19 remaining."

"Well, this is one of those situations where, if you're Russ Lemmon, you need your defence to make a stop," Badden commented. "Or better yet, force a turnover; that would give them the ball. What you don't want is for the Triumph to score with no little or no time left."

Antonio Brown

Walter Thurmond,

"And Brown will score! Touchdown, Triumph!" Winterall yelled. "Antonio Brown with his twelfth catch o of the game, and it gives his team the lead in the final minute of the fourth quarter!"

"There are just no more words for this guy!" Badden remarked as the camera focused on Brown dancing back to the Triumph sidel ing the football high. "You're going to have to invent a word for him. I mean, he has done it *all* his team in the biggest game of the year. I know he's got my vote for MVP!"

Bill Badden

"The only good thing about the Triumph scoring like that if you're the Swordfish is that you still have time to come back," B soberly. "Odell Beckham has been frustrated all day by the Triumph corners but he can still s Winston to get him the ball."



Who was slick in the Championship?

"BRYLCREEM" THE EFL'S FIRST SPONSOR





Twin Cities 31 Sebastian 24

	1	2	3	4	F
Twin Cities	0	7	7	17	31
Sebastian	14	0	3	7	24

* Championship * 03-04-2017 Neutral Park Temp:25 Wind:0-10 None No Line MVP:Palmer

1	5:46	Sebastian	TD	Anderson 6 run (Vinatieri) (13-78-6:42)	0-7
1	1:02	Sebastian	TD	Forsett 25 run (Vinatieri) (8-57-2:51)	0-14
2	8:39	Twin Cities	TD	Martin 4 run (Aguayo) (11-65-5:11)	7-14
3	12:01	Sebastian	FG	Vinatieri 31 (10-51-2:46)	7-17
3	8:39	Twin Cities	TD	Palmer 16 pass to Clay (Aguayo) (7-80-3:22)	14-17
4	11:49	Twin Cities	TD	Palmer 7 pass to Brown (Aguayo) (7-70-3:47)	21-17
4	7:10	Sebastian	TD	Winston 10 pass to Baldwin (Vinatieri) (8-80-4:39)	21-24
4	3:41	Twin Cities	FG	Aguayo 41 (10-46-3:18)	24-24
4	1:12	Twin Cities	TD	Palmer 26 pass to Brown (Aguayo) (5-52-1:06)	31-24

Player Stats

Passing	Att	Cmp	Yds	25	In	Td	Sk	Rate
Palmer	44	25	421	5	1	3	3	102.6
	44	25	421	5	1	3	3	102.6

Passing	Att	Cmp	Yds	25	In	Td	Sk	Rate
Winston	27	9	93	0	0	1	2	56.6
Dalton	7	6	62	0	0	0	1	103.6
	34	15	155	0	0	1	3	67.6

Rushing	Att	Yds	Avg	FD	10	Lg	Td
Martin,D	18	57	3.2	4	3	13	1
Palmer	2	2	1.0	0	0	3	0
	20	59	3.0	4	3	13	1

Rushing	Att	Yds	Avg	FD	10	Lg	Td
Anderson	17	125	7.4	8	5	18	1
Dixon,K	4	50	12.5	3	2	19	0
Winston	3	45	15.0	3	3	18	0
Forsett	4	32	8.0	2	1	25	1
	28	252	9.0	16	11	25	2

Receiving	No	Dp	Att	Yds	Avg	FD	25	Lg	Td
Brown	12	0	17	205	17.1	12	3	27	2
Clay	7	0	11	119	17.0	6	2	32	1
Matthews	5	0	9	81	16.2	5	0	20	0
Eifert	1	1	4	16	16.0	1	0	16	0
Vereen	0	0	2	0	0.0	0	0	0	0
Martin,D	0	0	1	0	0.0	0	0	0	0
	25	1	44	421	16.8	24	5	32	3

Receiving	No	Dp	Att	Yds	Avg	FD	25	Lg	Td
Baldwin	5	0	7	65	13.0	3	0	23	1
Anderson	4	0	4	33	8.3	1	0	13	0
Beckham Jr.	2	0	9	28	14.0	1	0	20	0
Amendola	2	0	3	15	7.5	1	0	8	0
Forsett	1	0	3	6	6.0	0	0	6	0
Watson	1	0	4	8	8.0	0	0	8	0
Dixon,K	0	0	1	0	0.0	0	0	0	0
Walford	0	0	2	0	0.0	0	0	0	0
Coleman	0	0	1	0	0.0	0	0	0	0
	15	0	34	155	10.3	6	0	23	1

Fumbles	No	Rec	Td
Palmer	2	2	0
Martin,D	1	0	0
Clay	0	1	0
	3	3	0

Fumbles	No	Rec	Td
	0	0	0

Kick Returns	No	Yds	Avg	Lg	Td
Vereen	4	28	7.0	9	0
	4	28	7.0	9	0

Kick Returns	No	Yds	Avg	Lg	Td
Amendola	2	46	23.0	29	0
	2	46	23.0	29	0

Punt Returns	No	Fc	Yds	Avg	Lg	Td
Brown	2	0	-1	-0.5	1	0
	2	0	-1	-0.5	1	0

Punt Returns	No	Fc	Yds	Avg	Lg	Td
Amendola	0	2	0	0.0	0	0
	0	2	0	0.0	0	0

Kicking	FG	Lg	XP	Pts
Aguayo	1-3	41	4-4	7

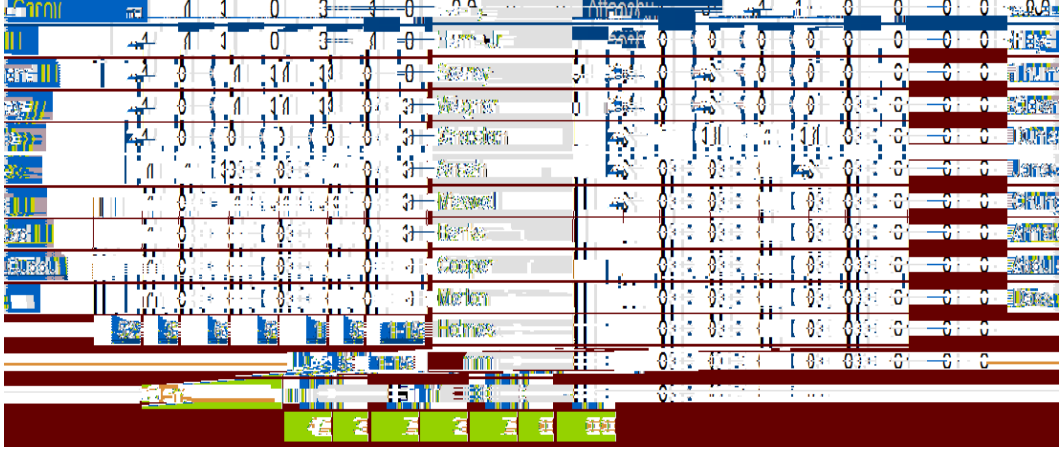
Kicking	FG	Lg	XP	Pts
Vinatieri	1-2	31	3-3	6

Punting	No	Yds	Avg	Tb	20	Bk	Lg
Jones	2	97	48.5	0	0	0	54

Punting	No	Yds	Avg	Tb	20	Bk	Lg
Berry	4	147	36.8	0	1	0	38

Defense	Tkl	Sk	Def	Stf	Hur	FF	Int
Freeman	7	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Roby	6	0	1	0	0	0	0-0
Slay	5	0	1	0	0	0	0-0
Hughes	4	1	0	0	4	0	0-0
Carroll	1	1	0	3	1	0	0-0

Defense	Tkl	Sk	Def	Stf	Hur	FF	Int
Perryman	12	0	0	3	0	2	0-0
Colvin	9	0	3	0	0	0	0-0
Posluszny	8	0	0	1	0	0	1-15
Breaux	6	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Attaochu	4	1	0	0	0	0	0-0





	Twin Cities	Sebastian
First Downs	29	25
Rushes	20-59	28-252
Passes	44-25-421	34-15-155
Sacked	3-17	3-23
Fumble	3	0
Penalties	5-35	2-15
Turnovers	1	0
Missed Tackles	7	2
Dropped Passes	1	0
Bad Passes	2	2
Passes 25+	5	0
Runs 10+	3	11
Blitzes	0	33
Time	30:18	29:42
Third Down	4-12	1-11
Fourth Down	3-3	3-3
Red Att/Td/Fg	5/3/0	2/2/0
Net Offense	463	384



AT THE EFL CHAMPIONSHIP

With Spats McChad

CANTON ’ My editor, **Mr. Finchley** made it bloody clear to me that this year my report from the EFL Championship would be subject to a word limit. He would not tolerate *“long novels full of bullsh*t about people trying to kill you”* ’ those were his exact words. I tell you this to explain why my article is shorter this year and to let you know that I work for a jerk. But I have to comply; **Mr. Finchley** l jyx% j%uzgqxmji 3% nyt[redacted]gfgq %gj%gqtllnsl%fsi%ktwhji%yt%gjl%tw%tsfyrtsx%yt%pjju% j%s%ujs%tsj 3% Or worse, I might be forced to apply for a job at the *New York Times*.

Times are tough in the sports media industry these days. The Internet and Social Media have created a myriad of avenues for people to exchange views and opinions outside of the mainstream, professional media outlets. For true freelancers, it has never been easier to get published, but it has never been harder to make a living at it. As a member of the syndicate I am guaranteed to get uzgqxmji 333str j mjwj3Fsi%gj[redacted]ti1% jqp-connected and reasonably well-known at this stage of my career, they will occasionally pay my expenses to attend major events like the EFL Championship. The year of the historic 10th EFL Championship in Canton was no exception ’ but my budget had been cut in half. This caused me some problems, as you will see when you read on.

THE ROAD TO CANTON

The birthplace of two professional leagues has become a shrine. As Mecca is to Islam, Canton, Ohio is to Football; every true football fan should travel there at least once in his or her lifetime to take in the Pro Football Hall of Fame. For me, once ’ back in 2007 for the inaugural EFL draft ’ was enough. While the Hall of Fame itself is worth the price of admission, the surrounding fywfhyrtsx%fwj%k%ymj%wzs-of-the-mill sort one could find most anywhere in America. Travel packages (yes, ymj%nxytwx%uzwjfz% offer these) are rightfully centered around the Football Hall of Fame and dressed up with trips to the Canton Classic Car Museum and the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in Cleveland 60 miles away. If you forgo the side trip to Cleveland you can substitute with a visit to the McKinley Presidential Library and Museum or a round of golf at the Glenmoor Country Club (in-xjfxts.3Fsi%ymfyx% about it for unique Canton tourist destinations. All the nonsense about vibrant arts, music culture, great museums, historic sites and zsnvzj%xmtux%hwjfyjx%ymj%ruwjxxrts%ymfy%Hfsyts%x%str j%psi%k%muxyjw%zqzwfq%hjsyjw% mhm%y%x%jhnijiq%sty3%ujfw%s mind that things that can be loosely described as above do exist in Canton; they just are not impressive enough to warrant going out of your way to see them, especially when you live in New York City.

But as far struggling rustbelt communities trying to survive in the era of global capital go, Canton is doing pretty well. At least there is *something* intewjxyxsl%yt%xjj%mjs%tz wj%ymjwj3R %wtgqjr %ny%Hfsyts%x%yx%jqjhyrtsfx%ymj%xjyysl%ktwymj%65th EFL Championship. It was bad when media across the continent descended on this place in 2007 after the cataclysmic collapse of the NFL. The lesson should have been learned then not to attempt to host another national event of such magnitude. But *no*, the memory of that debacle had apparently faded and been replaced with a vision of millions of dollars floating into the local economy. Fair enough, but when a community has two years to prepare I expect to see a lot more organization and a lot more infrastructure zu[redacted]j%ujhy%stymjwKjwfwtqfsi1%gzy%%tijxy%Kttygfqp% twj %tzq%f j%gjjs%mhj3%%

Canton does not lack for hotels on any given weekend. The city is the site of the annual Pro Football Hall of Fame Jsxmwsjr jsy% jjpjsi1%mhm%gwsl x%s%ymj%qfwjxy%mzsp%k%ymj%Mfqpx%jxyr fyji%555555%nxytwx%fsszfqp3%Gzy%ufqj%Xf jw% jek was expected to attract at least twice that number to the Canton-Cleveland area; and that was a conservative estimate based on an unlikely scenario involving Cowtown making it to the final. With Twin Cities and Sebastian making it, estimates became much higher, even accounting for the lack of a detectable Swordfish fan base outside of the Florida East Coast.

Due to budget cuts I had been booked into the Knights Inn, the cheapest hotel within 5 miles of the stadium. But it was cheap in quality only. The rate of $159.00 a night was about triple its normal rate for a xsl qj%gji%fsi%ymfy%shqzi ji%ymj%htwtwfyj% inxhtzsy3%%mj%JKQ%Hmfr urtsxmu%fi%fmxji%mtyjq%fyjx%fhwtxx%ymj%sywj%jl rts%fsi%ymjwj% jwj%st%fhfshmjx%fs mjwj% nyms%0 miles of Canton. So I was stuck with it unless I wanted to grab a room in Cleveland or Wooster and pay for it myself.

The quality of my hotel room was the least of my concerns, however. At least it was relatively close to the action. My flight was a torturous marathon of connecting flights ’ four in all ’ on a *Gusair* Saab 340 twin-engine turboprop relic from the 1990s. If

t z wj%s%f%yl my%gzi l jy%si%tz%ts y%fwj%k%tz%qn j%w%nj!%*Gusair Quality Discount Flights'* is the airline for you. The owner of the airline, **Gus Kuiper**, was an ex Marine Corps pilot who had flown missions during the Vietnam War and had recently retired from *Phillipine Airlines*, where he had worked as a trainer and consultant. The airline had sold him the outdated Saab 340 for $1.00 in honour of his long service. Gus advertised *"personal attention to your safety* % a valid claim as he was the one and only pilot for *Gusair*. Mnx%tr ufs x% jgxnyj%fx%ufhpji%ny%%q%umtyt x%fsi%jr twfgnqf%xwr %mx%njys fr%f x3%y j%Fgtzy%x%xjhyrts%k!% his site there was a boast that his co-pilot, son Gus Jr, has *"at the age of 40, just received his commercial pilot's licence, proof that you can do anything if you put your mind to it. I'm proud of my boy!"* But most disconcerting was the throwaway comment at the end of his company auto-bio that read: *Glad to be finally back in the cockpit after all these years!"*

Had I known any of the above *before* I got on the plane I would have rented a car at my own expense; and I might have arrived in Canton earlier if I had. My flight on *Gusair* took me, and two dozen other unwitting saps, from Teterboro Airport in the Meadowlands to Allentown, PA for a one-hour layover before re-boarding for Harrisburg, PA. In Harrisburg we refueled and ate a boxed lunch on Gus that consisted of a bottle of water, a cheese sandwich, and a twin-pack of Oreo cookies (he boasted that he was the tsq%nwqs j%t%ynqp%kkjw%%kwjj% jfq%si%%r tprsl%xjhyrts%os%ynj%qfs j.3%mj%hmjjxj %fsi rhm%fx%hyzfqq %*Cheez Whiz* between two slices of stale white bread. From there we flew to Morgantown, WV, where we dropped off a family of five heading to Little Falls for a family reunion. We cried as we parted ways ' they, tears of joy for having safely arrived; and us for having to endure one more leg of the journey. Finally we arrived in Akron, about 25 miles from Canton, exactly 5 hours and 23 minutes after we had taken off from Teterboro. The only thing right about this whole experience was the price: $89.00 round trip, approximately $500 less than the going cheap rate on a major carrier. Gus was likely making his money by not offering refunds and banking on his customers declining the wtzsi %fwy%k%ywu3

While the flight on *Gusair* was more dangerous than normally tolerable for a domestic flight, I had had more harrowing experiences on the extreme adventure holidays I used to go on when I was younger. *Gusair* had made me more uncomfortable than fearful. What really got under my skin was that the syndicate had made me travel to Canton on Thursday, Day 4 of Gale Sayers Week to save on hotel costs, depriving me of Opening Night and Media Day ' two long standing traditions for me going back to the first EFL Championship. If they were going to make me risk my life and comfort to get to Canton, they could at least make it worth my while when I got here.

My *Blackberry* (yes, I still use one of those!) had been pinging with messages from all of my sports writer buddies wondering where I was on Tuesday when Twin Cities Coach, **Guy Williams** was telling **Thomas Jenifer**, of the *Maryland Independent*, to stick his ujs% mjwj%ymj%zs%ts y%xmsj3%%mj%hmfwjwx%gjfy%wjutwjw%fi%xpji% nqfr x%t %mj%fx%wjufwsl%mx%qf jw%t%kfhj%f%yjam ynfy%fs%kl my%fhpl %%qjfw%nl%s%%jkjwjshj%t%ymj%tswr jwxfq% jjp%% t%zr r jqsl%ymj%%wzr umxfi%ir nsnxyjwji%t%ymj%p pansion St. Charles Chargers at the grand opening of Wilhalla Stadium. The exchange and the resulting trash talk between Triumph and Chargers fans had dominated the headlines and overshadowed the, in retrospect, even more controversial statement by Triumph end,

ynfy%Fsi %fqts%ts y%zwn j%ymj%nwy%zfwjw3

Being late turned out to be a theme of the 10th EFL Championship for Yours Truly. The paucity of cabs in Canton had brought cab drivers from across the State of Ohio to Canton to serve the hundreds of thousands of visitors who had descended all at once onto the city of 75,000. That included cab drivers from Akron. So I had to wait over one hour for a cab at the airport and then deal with unusual congestion on Highway I-77. I finally arrived at my hotel at 4:30 pm, four hours late for my lunch date with **Gabriele Laurent-Vainluven (Gabby)** %%sl my x%tw%jxutsjsy%tw%ymj%*LA Daily News*.

Gabby had made reservations at the Basil Asian Bistro on Market Avenue N. It was the only restaurant xmj%tsxnjwji%hmh% in the backwater of Canton. It was to be our first meeting since I had spent a week on the West Coast with her after the drama in Kjwfwtqfsi%fy%qfxy%jfwx%hmfr urtsxmu3%%mfy%nfi%gjjs%%hmj%yr j%gzy%%tw%wjfxtsx%ymfy%fwj%sts j%k!%tur business, we had decided to keep our relationship professional going forward.

So, in the professional capacity of two sports writers meeting to exchange notes about an important imminent sporting event I expected that she would have understood that my lateness was the result of my travel plans not panning out as planned and not due to some personal ambivalence or deliberate slight on my part. But apparently that was not the case.

I am at the brewing company with the others dont try to talk to me l %mj typed at the end of a long text exchange in which I had made the mistake of updating my progress with overly optimistic projections of when I would arrive.

I was not personally familiar with the Knights Inn brand and I was surprised to discover that they could be found across the country. Judging from the outside and the lobby there was certainly nothing fancy about the Knights Inn Canton. I dropped my bags and surveyed my room. It was plain but not untidy. There were nicks in the wall and the odd burn mark on the carpet, which was odd since I had requested a no smoking room. The bed looked neat at first glance. I turned up the covers to inspect the sheets and I was pleased to see that there were no visible dried stains on the pillow cases or sheets. There had evidently been a recent repair to the door and a spot on the wall near the bathroom. I unpacked my shaving kit and went into the bathroom. The toilet and sink were rust-stained and there was an unknown substance on the floor next to the bathtub. The towels looked dry and smelled clean, masking, not completely, the faint smell of mold. I brushed my teeth stiffly, half expecting a police raid to break out any second. *Oh well*, I thought. *I can live with it as long as I'm very drunk when I go to bed*.

I chasl ji% %xmwyfsi%fqpji%%fg3%Hfsytsx%wj nsl%%tr [redacted] jwji%mjs%%xpji% [redacted] %tnsl3

CANTON

In June 2016, Canton became the first Ohio municipality to allow the open consumption of alcoholic beverages in designated outdoor areas pursuant to State law enacted in 2015. Then it proceeded to designate the 25 square miles of Canton as a designated outdoor area for the Championship Game. With the refurbishing of Fawcett Stadium able to house approximately 27,000 fans, it was thought that turning the entire city into a designated outdoor area and installing huge digital TV screens carrying the broadcast in all city squares and parks would attract the many fans unable to secure actual tickets for the game. The problem, of course, was the cold weather. Football tailgaters are generally willing to endure freezing temperatures for 2 or 3 hours before game time, but not many are hardy or drunk enough to spend upwards of 6 hours standing in the cold to watch a football game.

The true test would come on game day, with temperatures forecast to be between 35 and 19 degrees Fahrenheit. But on Thursday night, with temperatures hovering around freezing, there did not appear to be anybody taking advantage of the open consumption by-law.

I waited 50 minutes for a cab. When I finally arrived at the Canton Brewing Company I found it to be jam packed. A pair of beefy security guards stood at the entrance with a couple of policemen standing idly off to the side keeping an eye on the crowds around the building. Although there were many people outside near the entrance, there was no discernible line that I could see. So I walked right up to the door and braced myself to be denied entry. But the security guards barely noticed me as I opened the door and walked inside.

I stepped into a restaurant that, surprisingly, was only moderately busy. I stood and scanned the room for a familiar face, but found none. A [illegible] walking past me, and I followed him down a flight of stairs. At the bottom of the stairs was a doorway with a curtain hanging in front of it. The man pushed the curtain aside and walked through. I followed him and found myself in a dimly lit bar. A policeman winking and pointing downward. The Speakeasy was in the basement ' as a speakeasy should be, I guess.

I could hear the din coming from below as I neared the top of the staircase. *So that is where everybody is*, I thought as I descended into a modestly lit bar packed with patrons, most of them wearing football paraphernalia of some kind. The place looked like I could well imagine a real speakeasy would have looked like back in the 20s, when professional football was officially born; except for the multiple large screen TV screens all over the place. I started to look around for my friends and found myself smelling the beer. Yes, the atmosphere was laden with the sweet smell of barley malt. Immediately, I knew that I was going to like this place.

I had been texting **Jean Boisvert**, Swordfish correspondent for the *Swampland Proof*, updating him on my location. He was at the cornhole boards; 'you cant miss them' [illegible] name called from opposite locations simultaneously.

Spats!" CA Spats!" CA It's about time, you donkey!">< I knew it was too good to be true [illegible] looked around.

To my front was **Quentin San Pedro** of the *Chino Champion*, holding a blue cornhole bag. Slightly to my rear and off to the side was **Charlie Wood** of the *Charleswood B[illegible]* to choose; they both came toward me.

[illegible]

[illegible]

As they got closer, I could see that Quentin and Charlie were avoiding each other while engaging me in banter.

[illegible] feeling a little awkward.

[illegible]

[illegible] hang out with those winl[illegible]

[illegible]

Quentin grabbed my left arm and Charlie grabbed my right and attempted to lead me in opposite directions.

[illegible]

Jennifer!" CA Leanne!" came the simultaneous replies, referring to their respective waitresses.

I settled the dispute by informing them that I had some pressing business with **Jean Boisvert** [illegible] me on all that had been going on in Canton in my absence.

I followed **Quentin San Pedro** to the cornhole boards. I was greeted there jovially by **Jean Boisvert** and several others ' a little *too* jovially. What the hell was going on?

I soon discovered the reason. It turned out that over the course of Gale Sayers Week the divisive subject of politics and the US election had come up more than once. Discussions had turned into heated exchanges, with the result that my fellow journalists had separated into camps ' one supporting Trump and the other supporting Clinton. These camps had quickly become so uncompromisingly partisan that they could not stand to be with each other. Friendships forged over the years were suddenly in

jeopardy. And the only reason I had been welcomed by both sides was due to my publicly avowed neutral position. I soon [illegible] the hfr ux% jwj%fwjsnsl%yt%% nym-us-or-against-zx %yyzij3%Hts jwnsl % j%fx%mj%sxfyji%gzy%jwfns%tfq%l%gtymymj%vzr u% and Clinton camps; a trophy for their respective causes.

The Trump side had staked out the area near the conrhole boards as its unofficial headquarters at the Canton Brewing Company. The Clinton side was across the room around the Giant Jenga game. Judging from the numbers present that night, the Trump camp was much smaller. But clearly not everybody was here; or if they were, they were hiding somewhere else, unwilling to get involved in the politics.

I was greeted convivially by the Trump group. **Randy the Desert Rat** of the *Mohave Torch*, never unfriendly but never overjoyed to see me either, dropped his red cornhole bags and sprinted over to shake my hand.

[illegible] between the lines[illegible]

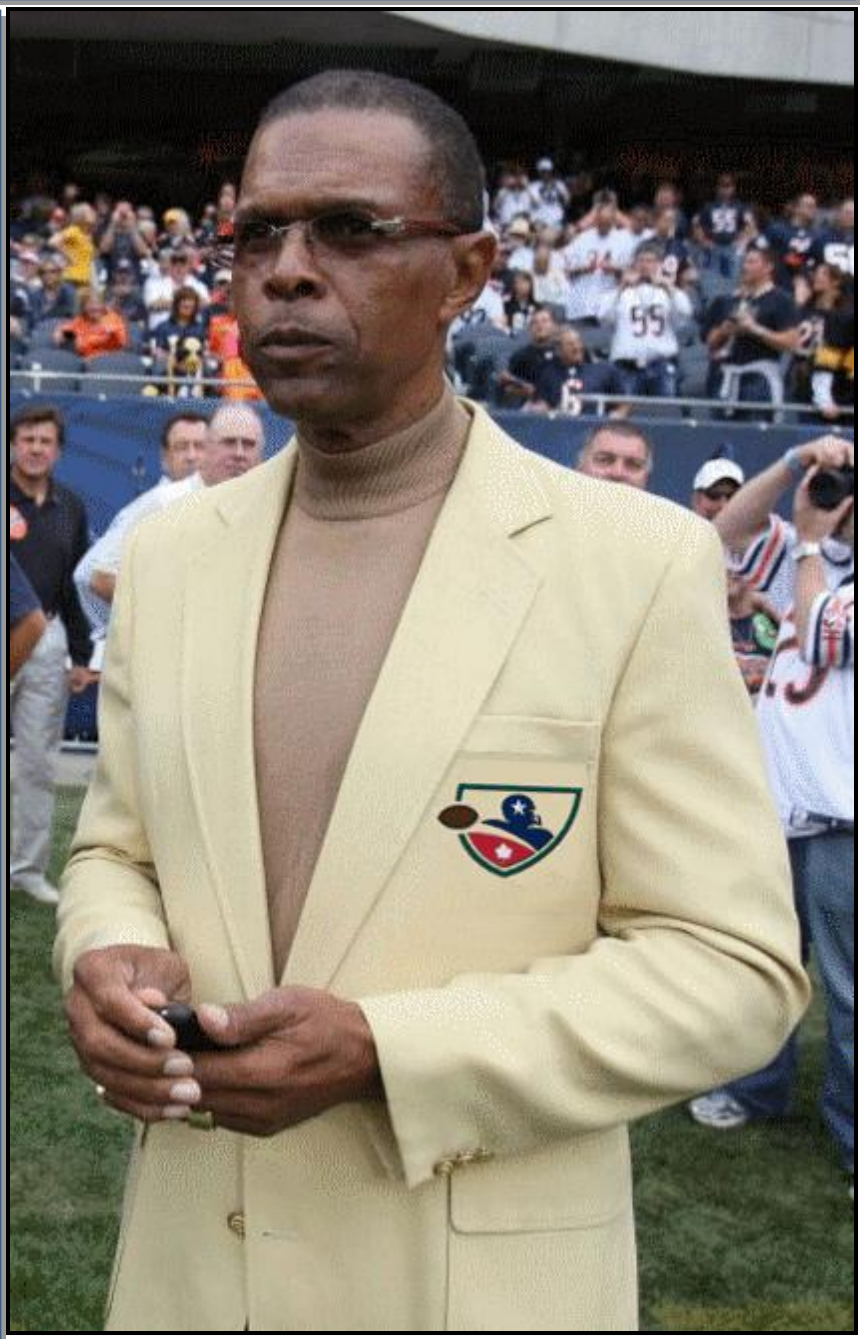
[illegible]

Randy burst out laughing as if I had made a [illegible] Spats! You know what I meant ' keep your readership intact by not pissing off the [illegible]

Also at the cornhole boards, and therefore implicitly aligned with Trump, was **Lars Odegard** of the *Wilhalla Press*; **Sir Reginald Malcolm Clapham** of the *Durham Diggatel & Pick*; **Sparky McGillicuddy** of the *Iowa Press Citizen* and, of course, **Jean Boisvert** and **Quentin San Pedro**. Each greeted me in turn as if I was some long lost brother. While we had all grown familiar over the years from attending the Championships together, I

It became apparent before the night was done that Randy was the loud ring-leader of the Trump group and Lars was the guy who would step in if the argument actually turned to the issues and away from personal insults. Randy seemed to embody the rage of Middle America that had swept Trump to an overwhelming victory in the Electoral College and across the counties of almost every State. The main population centers had mostly gone to Clinton, but the physical geography of the Trump landslide was undeniable. Randy, who lived near the border with Mexico, was clearly in favour of the Wall and replacing the Mexican Hellfire fans with born and bred Americans. Lars was more intellectual in his approach ' he felt the Democratic Party had lost touch with its labour base and had betrayed the core principles of liberalism and the American people. He saw an America on the road to economic ruin under the Democrats and, while he remained skeptical that Trump could deliver on all of his economic promises, he believed strongly

Sparky McGillicuddy was not a big Trump fan, but he was a staunch Republican and



Gale Sayers stands on the field at Fawcett Stadium prior to opening ceremonies at the 10th EFL Championship Game. It was the first time he had participated in the opening coin toss for the game that bears his name.

had voted for his party. The constant media attacks on Trump, a few warranted but most not, had put him in a reflexive defensive posture and had turned him, despite his pwj rtzx%qt %urnsrts%k%Ywzr u%syt%fs%shwjfxnslq%thnkjwtzx%jkjsijw%tzy%k%htr r ts% kfnwjxx%fsi%jhjsh 3

Sir Reginald Malcolm Clapham xrr uq%jfwsji%ktw%ymj%Mfqh ts%f x%k%twj %fsi%kjqy%nfy%Ywzr u%fx%f%ijlzqfw%gwhp% tk%f%kjqqt %s%xunyj%k%nx%ujshnfsy%ktw%lzr %fsi%yfsywzr x %mqj%**Quentin San Pedro** qpji%nfy%Ywzr u%fx%f%kd myjwt%f%ujwxts% mtl%qpj%nr %w%tyl%tzqi%kdmy%ktw%Fr jwhf %fsi%xhfwj%mj%xmy%zy%k%mj%Hmnsjxj&%

To my eyes, the most unlikely Trump supporter of the group was **Jean Boisvert**, who I considered a grounded person capable of seeing through the idiocy of modern politics and not getting overly worked up about which of the establishment parties was in power. It turns out that Boisvert, a natural Democrat in his sympathies, ijyjxyji%nx%ufwy x%hfsi nifyj%xt%zhn% ymj%fsy-ymjxnx%k%f%wzj%l jr thwfyl %mj%hfqjji%Mnqfw% ynfy%mj% fx% nqpsl%yt%tyj%ktw%ynfy%ltstwfsy%gqt nfwi%Ywzr u %gjhfzxj%mj%uzxy% r nlmy%gj%fgqj%yt%gwnsl%tgx%gfhp%yt%mj%snyji%Xyfyjx%fsi%f tni%f%fw%nynwWzxxf3%Mj%ntzlmy%y%fx% twynf%xnty3

I tried to steer the conversation back to football to catch up on what had been going on in Canton this week. But the sport we were all being paid decently to watch and write about was clearly second on the agenda for discussion, and a distant second at [redacted] fsflj%yt%xsi%zy%wtr %Vzjsys%nfy%mjwj%qy%k%zsnfuu %X twikxm%fsx%s%Hfsyts %nt%nfi%fij%mj%wjp%y%he last moment but found out when they got here that tickets to the game were not just sold out, but hardly available at all on the resale r fwpjy3%Ymj%kj %gjnsl%kkjwji% jwj%zy%k%mj%uwhj%fslj%k%mj%f jwfl[redacted]jj%k%Xjgfxyfs x%6 -1-1 regular season record fsi%f%htzuqj%l%jfx %uqf tkk%nsxl%mj%yjfr x%kfsxl%gjfyjs%t s%g %jfwx%k losing, could hardly believe the Swordfish were in the final game. Few had bothered to plan in advance, with the result that the many late bandwagon jumpers were now late for the party.

Triumph fans, on the other hand, had long anticipated that their team would make it to the Championship and were confident that they would win it all. There were thousands of them in Canton and many of them had tickets. The average Triumph kfs%ywzq%gjqnj ji%ynfy%756;%tzqi%gj%tzw%jfw3%Ymj %nfi%fyhmji%yt%fs %htr jgfhps, seen too many lucky bounces and firmly believed that ***Antonio Brown*** fx%xtr j%prnsi%k%Xnti3%Ymj %nfis y%qxy%%fr j3%Xt%m%xfw%st D

I ordered a beer from Jennifer ' a *Red Spear Red Ale*, brewed right here at the Canton Brewing Company. Too late, I realized my gaffe. My choice of the colour red merely confirmed what **Randy the Desert Rat** had suspected: that I had secretly voted for Donald Trump.

Ltti%htrhjl%Xufyx&%Wfsi %qfzlmji%fsi%[redacted]3%[redacted]hp%yt%ymj%*Amstel Light*, but I get your point you sly dog&

At some point about 30 minutes into my visit to the Trump Camp, I became aware of burning eyes watching me from a distance. I could not see who it was, but I had the unmistakable feeling that I was being watched and judged. I looked down at my *Blackberry*3%Ymjwj%jwj%twj%nfs%%t js%j yx3%Ymj%qfxy%sjl%wtr %nfgg l%wjfi%you have no shame spats3

Xtww%z xl%tyyt%mjfi% jwfsi%xjj%Lfgg-l%[redacted]zuyji%Xnw%Wjlnsfqil%nt%fx%htskjxxnsl%yt%ymj%ymjw%ynfy%mj%fx% feeling deep seated guilt about having killed an elephant in Kenya many years ago on a safari.

^tz%fsy%gfhp-zul%XufyxD%Wfsi %fxpji3%Ymj wj%%gzshm%k%nrtyx% jwy%mjwj%fsi%tzw%nwq%nfgg %x%qjfinsl%mj%fhp& [redacted]%pf l%Wfsi 3%Ymfqpxl%[redacted]ji%fsi%fqpji%f l%qtpnsl%wtzsi%ktw%ymj giant Jenga game that marked Clinton territory. I did not have to look for very long. Within seconds of crossing the floor I saw Gabby leaning against a railing near the bar. She was wearing a light blue cotton dress, a feathered scarf and a blue ball cap with some design on the front the reminded me of a spirograph drawing. I was about to make a wisecrack then I saw her withering glare and held my tongue.

[redacted]uq%tyyfqpnsl%yt%tzl %mj%fni%xujfpnsl%%[redacted]3%[redacted]xy%f nsl%tzw%juzyfynts3%Ujtuqj%wj%fqpnsl3 mt x%yfqpnlD%%[redacted]3

[redacted]tz%[redacted]yyfqpnsl%yt%tz3%Mjw%twix%jwj%quuji%fsi%xmj%fqpji%nynj% fllj wfyji%ktwhj%t fwi%mj%nfsy%jslf% lfr j3% mjs%j%tyhqtxj%xmj%zi ijsq%kqfxmji%f%xr nqj%fsi%fsstzshji%t%ymj%[redacted]ji%mj naughty boy from the Ku Klux Pqfs%wfqq &

There was general laughter and I heard **Charlie Wood** jqq!%Gjmnsi%j jw%itwsnh%ifs%mjwj%nf%xr fw%tr fs%qpj% Lfgg %pjjunsl%nr %wtr %fqnsl%syt%mj%xnijk%l%gzx&%

[redacted]ji3% nfy%tjx%nfy%[redacted]D%[redacted]%Hnfrlie, genuinely puzzled until I realized that he was gob-smacked drunk and it inis y%wjfqq%fyyjw3

The Clinton Camp welcomed me, but not as warmly as the Trump Team had. This was because I had gone *over there* first, raising suspicion and resentment about my motives for doing so. Charlie was first to come over. He got a little too close to me ' the way that drunks tend to do when they are really drunk and drawn to whatever they are looking at. He whispered in a loud voice: I ts y%twwl%[redacted]fyx&%[redacted]ji%tz&%[redacted]%tz%tyji%ktwHqsytsl%mj%q[redacted]ji3%[redacted]%tzw%tqr [redacted]%fsi%[redacted]jfi%ymwtzlnmy%mj% lines. Smart idea to throw those Tumpsters a bone by not shooting down their hero ' tz%ts y%fsyy%qtxj%t%fs %jfi jwx3

Also playing Giant Jenga, and therefore supporting Clinton (or at least *not* xzuutwnsl%Ywzr u.% fx%Rtsfwhmx% correspondent, **Michael S. Hickenbottom** of the *Orange County Register*; **Johnny Rebb** of *The State*; **Mike Myers** of *The Scarberian*; **Molly Qerim**, spokesperson for the Triumph; **Kokopali Crimpton** of the *Carthage Carving*; **Marcus Aurelius** of the *Gwinnett Tribune*; **Aristedes Kalogiannis** of the *Pickering Post*; and three others who I had not met before, although I could have sworn I knew the older gentleman sitting next to **Johnny Rebb**, cradling a glasx%t[redacted]if3%[redacted]t%qfhj%nr %gzy%tzqis y3

Lfgg l%fq f x%fyzs ji%yt%xt hnfc%hz jxl%xuwzs l%xs yt%fhyrts 3%Tm%Xufyxl%tz%nf js y% jy%Kjwrnj&%xmj%xvzjfqji 3%Xmj%wfggji% r %fw r %fsi%qji% j% jw%yt%xmj%fgqj 3%Kjwrnj l%xmr%n%Xufyx%R hHnfi 3%Mj% wyjx%kt w%xmj%x si rnfyjl %xmjs%xmj%zws ji%yt% j 3%Xufyxl%xmr% is Fergie and his friend Archibald. They cover the Cadillac for the *Chatham Daily News*3

[redacted] S t r %[redacted] %xjwj%[redacted] jjs%xmr %gjkt wj&%Kjwrzxts %Gjs [redacted] 3%^ tz wj%Kjwrzxts %Gjs prs x&

He smilei%fsi%st i i ji 3%Kjwrzxts %Gjs prs x%xmj%Knwxyl %xmj%jhqfwji 3%Fs i%xmr%n% %kt - wyjwl%Fwhmngfqi%f nj x3

Kjwrzxts %Gjs prs x%xmj%[redacted] l%st y%zwj%k%xnf y%[redacted] jfs y%[redacted] xmj%wtsl%z 3%Mj%zwj%qt pji%qpj%**Ferguson Jenkins**.

Kjwrzxts %Gjs prs x%xmj%Knwxy%r%r y, as the French say, *non de plume*l %xmj%wjuqji l%fkkjhyrsl%f%ut twl%Kwjshnr%fhhjsy3%Mj% hnzl [redacted] 3% [redacted] nf y%nf y%xmj %f l%Fwhmnj D%Gzyl%l%ktzwxjl%xut wyx%kfs x%ps t %j%x%Kjwrnj%Gjs prs x3

Ferguson Jenkins had been a major league pitcher, playing 19 seasons for four different teams. Born in Chatham, Ontario, he was the first Canadian to be inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame. Although he had never pitched for any New York team, he was one of my favourite baseball players of all time. I used to have his baseball card at the top of my deck ' even above Tom Xjf jw3%ts y%xp%[redacted] **Ferguson Jenkins** ' it started as one of those kid things where I simply liked his baseball card.

Fergie, I would find out, was enjoying his retirement and was trying out various things, including sports writing. In this he was assisted by a less famous, but distinguished young writer: **Archibald Davies**, grand nephew of Canadian novelist **Roberston Davies**. Fergie would express his thoughts about a sporting event freely and Archibald would diligently make notes. Following the j jsy%xmj %tzqi%yt l jymjw%r fu%zy%fs%fwyrhqj%fsi%Fwhmngfqi%tzqi%wyjx%xmj%3%Xmj%g qrs j%tzqi%xjfi?%*by Chatham's own Ferguson Jenkins I."* I expressed my surprise that the young Archibald would not be credited for his work.

Tm%jp jwgti %pst x%Fwhmnj%wyjx%xmj%t wi xl %Kjwrnj%qfzl mji 3%Fwhmnj%rl qji 3%Ynfyx%st y%%xjhwjy%s%Hnfynfr -P jsy3

It turned out that Davies was an antiquarian and wrote extensively about the rural antique market in southern Ontario. He hfi%pfw ji%%xtqi%xjuzyfyrts%s%xmfy%fwjf%fsi%ri%st y%fs y%t %fwhmx%wtkjxxrts fq%r fl j%nyn%xmj%yfrs y%l%xut wyx%wyrsl%which he i jxhwgji%x%f%qlm%fsi%kwn tqtzx%n jwxrts %nfy%xmj%ri%kt wkzs 3%Ynfy%hnfwfhyjwn fyrts%l%zw%htqpjhyn j%wtkjxxrts%ri not go over very well with those of us at the table who took our sports writing very seriously. But Davies was vehemently anti-Trump and that redeemed him in the eyes of most.

The two others I did not know were **Thomas Jenifer**, Chargers correspondent for the *Maryland Independent*; and **Dave Hodge** of TSN (the Canadian ESPN) and a guest writer for the *Asbury Park Press*, covering the Wrecking Balls. Jenifer carried himself with an air of superiority that did not quite equate to his somewhat shabby deportment. I would later find out that he was a direct descendent of **Daniel of St. Thomas Jenifer**, a former colonial governor of Maryland and one of the Founding Fathers of the United States. This fact was always brought up as punctuation to any point Thomas (and he inxnxyji%ujtuqj%hfqp%nr %Ynrtr fx.% made that he sensed was failing to carry the argument. He too, was stridently anti-Ywzr ul%zj%yt%nx%hjwyfrs y%nfy%xmj%Ktzsirsl% Kfxmjw% tzqi%gj%uufqpji%fy%Ywzr u&%**Dave Hodge** was much more laid back and very diplomatic. He did not look comfortable yfqprsl%ut qtyrhx%gzy%nx%qjfsrs l x% jwj%qjfwq %s%xmj%fsyn- fqp%fr u3

To my great surprise Gabby, the social butterfly who always strived to make everyone comfortable, was the main agitator for the Clinton camp. Watching her in action had rendered me speechless. This was not the Gabby I knew. There was something i jyfhmji%fgtzy%xmj%r fyjzw%yyjr uy%fy%xmjyt wh3%Xmj%xmwj %fwtzsi%xmrfxjx%qpj?%Ywzr u%fsyx%yt%xmqjshj%tr js % j%nf j%nt xjn Kjfw%fsi%Mfyj% jw%Qt j%fsi%Hltr ufxxrts %Fr jwhf%fx%g [redacted] %[redacted] wfsyx%fsi%st %xmj%fsyx%yt%xmwt %xmjr f%qp%zy % j%zxy% wjxnxy%Gnltyw%fsi%rtqjshj %fsi%xmj x%st y%R ^%wjxri jsy%fx%l%wjfirsl%wtr f%xhwuy3%Ujwnfux%xy%fx%st y%t%xzwwxrsl %xmj%was a product of Hollywood after all. To all this, the others nodded mechanically in agreement and offered thoughts of their own:

I ts y%ktwl jy%xmj x%Zyrs x%gzr %gzii &%xmj%tzsl%**Michael S. Hickenbottom** blustered, his voice cracking on *Put*.

[redacted] yji%yt%hw% mjs%xmj%t hpji%xmfy%nxfgqji%ujwxtsl%**Molly Qerim** proclaimed, her head shaking slowly from side-to-side and her lower lip quivering.

Mj%wjr rsi x% j%kl%s jwtl %wjr fwpji%**Marcus Aurelius**.

Mj%fsyx%yt%zy%fyn j%Xfr tfsx%s%jfyn%lfr ux&%gjqpt ji%**Kokopali Crimpton**.

Everyone stopped and turned to Crimpton. **Johnny Rebb** gwtpj%xmj%xmqjshj?%Wjfqp D

Kokopali looked around. All eyes were upon him. **Molly Qerim** qtpji%wjfi %yt%gzwxy%xs yt%yjfwx3% jqpppmj%nfxs y%xfri% so....*yet*&%Rtpoufq%wjuqji%kjjgq 3%Gzy% j%qp%st %xmj x%xmrsprsl%gtzyny&%xmj%ii ji%xm%twj%xxzwfshj3

Everyone nodded sagely and grunted forms of agreement.

Qttp%ujtuqjl%yx%wjfqp%xr uqj&%Mj x%zxy%szyx%fsi%xmtzqi%gj%r ujfhmjil %f%wzspjs%**Charlie Wood** declared, taking advantage of the lull to wrest control of the narrative and establish himself as the top anti-Trump guy.

The table roared its approval and Charlie called for a round of drinks. Leanne arrived and took our orders. I ordered a *Blue Moon*. Immediately, I realized my blunder but it was too late to change it; **Charlie Wood** had heard me. He leaned into me and said:

S rhj%rhpl%Xufyx&%Rtxy%ujtuqj%ts y%fyhm%xmj% jxxfl j%kl%xmj%gqzjg%tyj [redacted] Mj%rspji3

S ty% jwgti %jsyjwji%xmj%kt w%fhp%kl%f%gjyjw% twi.%irxhzxxrts 3%**Mike Myers** just smiled at everyone and everything and drank his beer. **Aristedes Kalogiannis** left the table shortly after I arrived; not concealing the fact that he was doing so to avoid me. **Johnny Rebb** xjjr ji%jslfl ji l%gzy%wjxnxyji%kkjwsl%twix%kt w%xmj%y t%rs zyjx%kl%nfyj %nfy%xmx%gjrsl%Ynzwxi f %srl my l%nfi% yzwsji%xyt%ktzw%f x%kl%nfyj %nwjhyji%fy%Ywzr u3

Later in the evening, at the 11:00 pm turning point when the hard core partiers began to separate from the lightweights, I learned more about what had motivated **Johnny Rebb** to vote for Clinton:

Yvzr u%[illegible]%us all for a ride' some willingly, some unwillingly. He is the worst of hypocrites because he gives the average American real hope that he will reverse the inevitable djhqsj%[illegible] it used to be. The world is changing and Trump wants to bring us back to a time that cannot exist in the present. Hillary would have kept the status quo, which has its flaws, but would give us a gentler landing. Trump is going to lead us off a cliff, but not in the way [illegible]

At that moment I realized something that felt to me, at the time, to be quite profound. Judging from what I had heard, nobody in the Clinton Camp had voted *for* Hillary; they had all voted *against* Trump. **Johnny Rebb** was the only one who had even hinted at an understanding of [illegible]

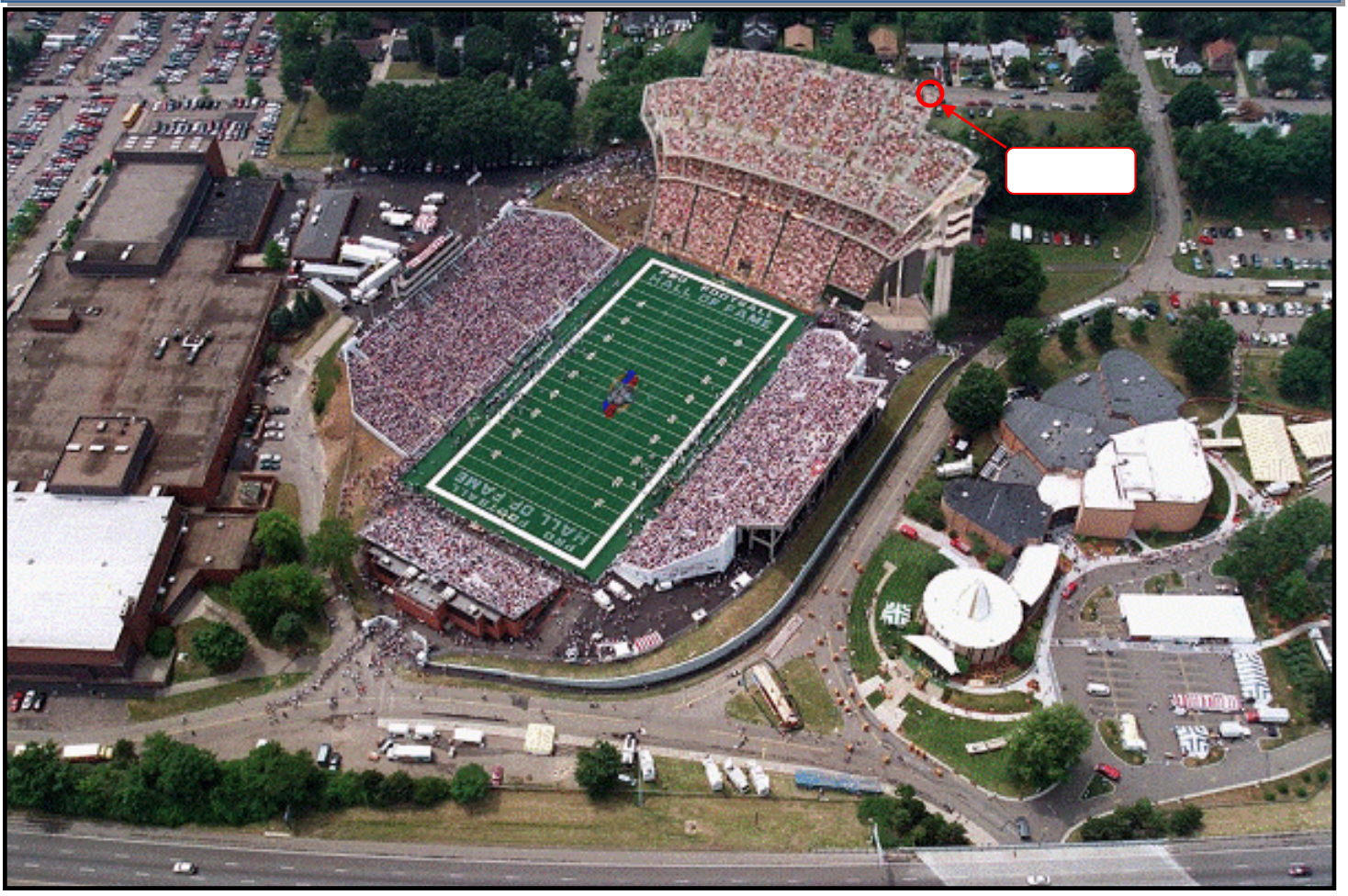
The Canton Brewing Company had extended its hours of operation for Gale Sayers Week. The Speakeasy was still busy at 2:30 am, but only a few of my journalist friends remained. Gabby and Molly, their political rant burnt out, had gone up to the restaurant to commiserate about how horrible men could be and, at some point, they had left. **Charlie Wood** had become incoherent and was stuffed in a cab just after midnight by **Aristedes Kalogiannis**, who was staying at the same hotel.

Lanny McDonald of the *Markham Economist & Sun* wandered into the picture some time before midnight. [illegible] he had been all night but he hung around, two-fisting it with the diehards, until closing time.

By 3:00 am I was feeling the effects of the beer. When combined with the long and uncomfortable day of travel it threatened to put me completely out of [illegible] handed me a big blue, silver and gold ticket [illegible] emblazoned on the front.

[illegible]

[illegible]



Fawcett Stadium in Canton on Gale Sayers X as viewed by *Brylcreem Blimp*. The location of my seat is circled in red above.

Wjfqq D%xmj%qttpji%xzwuwxji3% jqq!%pjju%y%fs f %ns%hfxj%tz%hmfslj%tzw%nsi3% jwj%xtqi%zy%xzsif %fsi%tz% ts y%gj%fgqj%xt%jy%x%nyxzy%x3%[redacted]sl%xt%gj%htqi%zyxnij3

I was too drunk to put up a fight ' especially with a cute waitress, who was inviting me to a bar. I liked this place anyway. *Best to keep my options open*, I thought in that foggy moment. *But, why me*?

j%jy%fkj %k%ymjxj%p jw%nlmy%xt%n j%zy%xt%zw%gjxy%nuujwxl%xmj%nllqji3%Uqx%tz%qttp%qpj%f%nhj%z 3

Me, a best tipper? I thought. I looked down at my credit card receipt and my eyes popped out of my head. I had accidentally entered 100% on the keypad nsxyjfi%k%65* %ktw%jssnkjwx%xu3%Qjfss jl%s%ymj%ymjw%nfsi!%nfi%wjhjived my standard 10% for drinks-only service and was no longer anywhere near me.

Xjj%tz%xzsif !%ojssnkjw%xfni%s%f%xnsl-songy voice.

RED LIGHT RUN

By 3:30 am, staff at the Canton Brewing Company were pushing us out the door. All that was left of my journalistic entourage were the Trump crowd (minus **Sir Reginald**, and **Sparky McGillicuddy** who had gone back to their hotels) and **Johnny Rebb**.

Tpf %xufyx&%Qjyx%xnsi%zy%k%tz% jwj%xlmy%fgtzy%ymj%)65%ttpjw%s%hfsyts&%**Quentin San Pedro** shouted as we milled around outside waiting for a cab.

Vzjsyns x%hmfqpjslj%nfi%tr j%ytyfqj%zy%k%qjk%qjj3%[redacted]tr uqjyjq%ktwtyyj%yfy%[redacted]wyyjs!%kk-the-cuff in one of r %wtzlmjw%htqzr sx!%nfy%Hfsyts%fx%ymj%*home of the $10 blo*[redacted]3%[redacted]utqln ji%o Canton the following week and I had thought it was done. But Quentin remembered; and he seemed genuinely anxious to find out....through me.

Gzy[redacted]%f j%s %fxnt%%j1%[redacted]xyji% as if that was the only thing stopping me.

Quentin smiled, his gold teeth flashing in the streetlil myx3%Mjwj%tz%t!% %wjsil%nj%xfni3%Mj%njq%zy%%65%gnqp3

[redacted]Fsi%[redacted]%ktw%ymj%fgl%**Randy the Desert Rat** volunteered.

Ymx%xntzqi%gj%ttil%**Johnny Rebb** said with a smile. **Lars Odegard** and **Jean Boisvert** rolled their eyes.

The six of us crammed nsyt%sj%k%ntxj%fg%fsx3%Yfpj%zx%yt%ymj%wji%ql my%nxwhy&%wnji%Wfsi %gtqiq 3%Hfzyts%fi%gjjs% officially thrown out the window.

[redacted]y%t%nsyt%ymj%jyfnq%gjhfzxj%[redacted]% they are simply too embarrassing for the people involved. And yes, I was involved, but I never got to sample the $10 service I was eventually able to track down. Somebody else did, however, and that person will remain nameless. But we have pictures. And if that person ever, ever steps out of line and breaches our constantly changing journalistic code of ethics, those pictures might very well find their own way onto YouBoob.

I got back to my hotel some time before dawn to find a couple of police cars parked out front. One of them still had its emergency lights flashing. I stumbled past an officer sitting in the passenger side writing on a clipboard.

J jwymnsl%pf l%k[redacted]jwD%[redacted]ji3%

Mj%qttpji%fy% j% nym%ymfy%ujj ji%qttp%htux%jy%mjs%ymj %tsy%fsyxt%fqp%yt%tz%gzy%fwj%gqplji%yt%xf %xtr jymnsl%yt% rfpj%tz%t%f 3%J jwymnsl x%xnsj%st l%xwl%mj%wjuqpjii%s%fs%kkjhyji%wvtkjxxntsfq%ts j3%F%fwy%ty%f%qyqj%zy%k%htsywtq%si%% ujwxts%fx%xntyl%gzy%mj qq%zwnj3

[redacted]%ymjwj%zrgq%ktw%f%tr jsy3%I t%xnttynslx%fuujs%kyjs%s%ymx%[redacted]3%[redacted]r %zy%kyt sl%tz%st 3

Wjfqq D%mj%sx jwji%xfwfxynhfqq 3%St y%kyjsl%sq%p jw%xjhtsi%jjpjsi%xzfqq 3

I went to my room, engaged the safety lock and crashed on the bed. I would not wake up again until 1:00 pm the next day.

PRE-GAME

My plans for Friday were blown up before they started. I missed the Football Writers of America Breakfast at the Fairfield Inn & Suites in South Canton. **Gale Sayers** fx%hmjizqji%t%gj%ymj%zjxy%ujfpjt[redacted]%[redacted]ji% %r fpj-zu %qshm%fyj%nym%fgg %y% Thatsa Wrapp on 6th Street. My *Blackberry* was pinging like sonar and I was afraid to read the messages. Between two missed lunch dates and my perceived questionable loyalty to the cause of Hillary Clinton, my relationship with Gabby was tumbling down a steep hill this week.

A group of us were to meet at the McKinley Presidential Library and Museum for 3:00 pm for a tour before the Press Dinner and Awards Night at the Canton Club Event Centre. I showered and shaved and called a cab. As I waited, I screwed up the courage to check my messages.

'you are a jerk!!!!!' fx%ymj%fyjxy%sj%xtr %[redacted]3%[redacted]yg%tymjwt%wjfi%ymj%jxy3%

I arrived at the museum to find that many of our group had bailed on the tour. I checked the rest of my messages. In addition to about a dozen angry ones from Gabby, there were cancellation messages from everyone who had been with me on the red light run through Canton, as well as several of the others. They all offered various excuses designed to conceal that they were, in all probability, still hung t jw%xtr %fxy%nlmyx%gjjw%jxyn fq3% nfy%ni%y%xl %fgtzy%[redacted]gjjs%ymtzlnf%qpynfy%si%fx%ynq% fgqj%t%xnsi% %f %t%sj%k%Hfsyts x%xlsfyzwj%ywfhytsxD

Marcus Aurelius of the *Gwinnett Triubune* fx%ymjwj3%tz%htzqis y%nx%nr %s%nx%hick, winterized toga and white uqfxyjw% fxp3%Mj%fx%jfljwyt%xjj%nfy%nfi%gjjs%wjxjwji%xtr %ymj%RhPnsqj %jwfl%t%xjj%nk[redacted]gjwy3%*Huh*? He was known to make odd statements like that. Most brushed Marcus off as a high-functioning madman like **Merlin the Magician** of the York *Round Table Chronicle*, but more capable of carrying on a real conversation.



This picture of me was taken by Quentin San Pedro through the front window of our cab in Canton s red light district. I am pointing to some loose change that had fallen on the sidewalk.

While we were waiting for the tour to start, Marcus let it slip that the Gladiators were about to move to Lake Oconee in Green County, G[redacted]pos t s%ynfy%ynj%yjfr x%qjfxj%s%ynj%Ht qxjzr % had expired and that owner **Dave Birdsall** was looking to relocate the team. But there were several places in the running and no official move had been announced. My source inside the Gladiators organization had been unable to give me the inside scoop, apart from nskt w nsl% j%ynfy%% fx%Gnwxfqx%jhnxts%si%nj%nfi s y% fi j%u%nx% mind. But Marcus clearly had other sources who knew better.

By the time the tour got underway ' it was a special guided uwjxx tour to promote the museum to the maximum ' only me, Marcus, **Marquis de Sade** of the *Virden Eviscerator*, and one of the new beat reporters, the **Birdman of Brooklin**, who covered the Hawks for the *Brooklin Town Crier*, were in attendance.

The **Birdman** was wearing a bird costume and introduced mr xjqk%yt%zx%fx%Gnwr fs3%St l%*'hey my name's Jack Smith but I go by the pseudonym Birdman"* ' simply: Gnwr fs %xzwfr j: Tl% Gwt[redacted]jr gfwfxxji%yt%gj%xjjs%nynymx%wtzu3%Tynjw%jtuqj% visiting the attraction assumed my colleagues were some kind of living display from the museum. A group of High School students gathered around the **Birdman of Brooklin** and tried to touch his

feathers. I caught the **Marquis de Sade** leering at the young girls.

Marquis de Sade, dressed as a French aristocrat from the 18th century was mistaken by the historically-challenged as a Fr jwnfs%Wj tqzyntsfw% fw%njwt%l%xtr j%nsi%WUwjxnijsy%R hPnsqj %mr xjqk3% mjs%nj%yjuqjji%yt%ynj%zjxyntsw% mt%fwj%tzD% with his real name, people look confused and walked away.

I came away from the tour thinking that if I had been hoping to learn more about President McKinley I would have been very disappointed in the library and museum dedicated to his memory. This was more of a 6th grade natural science and discovery ytzw%ynfs%%xjwtzx%xmns j%t%ynj%mxytw%k%% fs%si%mx%jwf3%R hPnsqj x%tr g%fx%jw%r uwjxxn j%t j jw3

I went back to my hotel and changed into my suit for the Friday night gala.

Everybody who was anybody in the world of EFL journalism was at the Press Dinner and Awards Night at the Canton Club. The EFL and the Associated Press were co-hosting the event. Cocktails began at 6:00 pm and dinner started at 7:00 pm. The reception area was packed and buzzing with the hum of professional gossip mongers trying to outdo each other with witticisms and scoops on the upcoming game.

Tarkin Smith-Abdullah tl%I jfymxuzs %nsyji%ynfy%nj% fx%j jqtunsl%f%xtw%fgtzy%f%Xwzr unx%u %xhfsifq%nfy% tzqi% gqt %Mjfixjy-lfyj %zy%l%ynj% ater. The Triumph were practising at the North Canton Memorial Stadium while the Swordfish were working out at the Paul Brown Tiger Stadium in neighbouring Massillon. Neither of those were professional facilities and they afforded no secrecy whatsoever. **Guy Williams** had lobbied to have the teams share old Cleveland Browns Stadium, which was currently being used to host college bowl games, but the EFL Committee had blocked the move without giving a reason. Smith-Abdullah assured us that both teams were spying on each other and suggested that the Triumph were winning the spy war by using iwsjx%t%jy%%gnwx%j%nj %l%ynj%qf x%si%fi%ni jsx%fr jwfx%si% nwtunts jx%s%ynj%qhpjw%tr x%i%u %s%nj% jjysls.

A rumour that ***Odell Beckham Jr*** was secretly injured was based on the fact that he had not been observed running full speed drills in practice. But a flip si[redacted]of that rumour was that Beckham had taken himself out of full speed drills to avoid injury to his hamstring, which had bothered h[redacted]all season.

But the main hot topic of [redacted]cussion was the small size of the stadium and the resulting lack of tickets to the game. The exorbitant prices being d[redacted]s bordered on larceny. To make matters worse, the press boxes had only been expanded enough to accommodat[redacted]e additional international broadcasts. The vast majority of small outlet journalists and kwjqfshjwx%fi%gjjs%xyzhp%s%ynj%f[redacted]qfw%xjfyns l%ynfy%fi%gjjs%sxyfqji%s%ynj% jxy%si%ts j%fx%ufwy%l%ynj%wjkzwgnxnsl %l% Fawcett Stadium. **James Duthie** of [redacted]SN and *The Auroran* nfi%ynj%Xjfy-Xjjpjw%uu[redacted]e. One-by-one angry journalists fired off expletives after checking the app and seeing the field view from their seats. I was angered to find mine at the very top of the auxiliary seating. The[redacted]out Fawcett Stadium ' that it put /F8 9e0 g0 G[redacted]003-147004B6(o)-5(in)7 545.4 4TQ

wine and beer flowed pretty freely as well.

As expected, the mainstream media dominated the awards. **Peter Prince** of *North America Today*, head suck-up to the qjflzjl% ts%ymj%uwjxyd ntzx%Htr r nyyjj%fsi%Uwjxni jsyx%F fwix%ktwmx%nsxdmykzq%gfqfshjil%fwmhzqfyj %wjutwns l%ynfy%xjy%he xyfsifw %ktw%ymjwx3%**Tarkin Smith-Abdullah** tl%*Deathspun* %wjhjnyji%mj%sljyd fyn j%Qzwsfqnsm Award from the Associated Uwjxx3%Ymx%fx%gny%kf%xzuwnxj%xshj%*Deathspun* %fi%wi ji%yxjqk%s%gjnsl%zshtr uwtr nxnsl%x%%ktzwhj%kymj% txy%hfsifqtzx% football news that others were too timid to publish. Many saw this as a coordinated attempt by the mainstream press and the league to co-opt *'Deathspun'* into being a more cooperative partner down the road. **Harry Schultz** of FootballOutriders.Org received the Excellence in Analysis Award; while the tired duo of **Phil Winterall** and **Bill Badden** ts%ymj%Gwfi hfxy%F fwi %ktw%ymjnw%htsm% play-by-uqf %fsi%fsfq xnx3%Qthfq% jinf%fsi%wjqfshjw% jwj%qr txy%tyfqj% hqzi ji%wtr %ymj%tinzr 3%Mt j jw%ymj%tr %f j%% hearty round of applause when **Orville Smucker** of the *Cowtown Plain Dealer* received the Legacy Award for being the first fhhwjinyji%tzwsfqnx%s%fs %ktwzr %t%zgqnxm%fs%fwmhqj%s%ymj%LKQ3%[redacted]fuujfwji%s%Twnqjj x%htqzr sl%Ymj%Xr zhpjw%Xhttul%fsi% it had miraculously scooped everybody, including ESPN. A framed copy of the article was included with his plaque.

I was a little miffed that I had not been recognized. I am the most widely published EFL writer with the syndicate ' nobody else even comes close. Politics certainly played a role in this. While I am generally supportive of the league, my occasional scathing hwmhnxr %jyx%zsi jw%ymj%[redacted]gjjs%sxywzhyji%wjhjsyq%g %R w3%Ksnhmqj %t%yts j%t s %hwmhnxr %k the journalistic standards, or lack thereof, of some of my professional colleagues in the mainstream media.

As the dinner wound down, guests moved from their pre-assigned seats to other tables to accommodate the profound split that had developed along political lines even here at the Awards Dinner. I was tired of it all. Not even the beer was protecting me from the headache I was developing from having to listen to the increasingly strident debates between Trump and Clinton supporters breaking out around me and the efforts of the participants to bring me in.

In desperation I struck up a conversation with a certified weirdo, **Sperl Sponefritter** of *Sperl's World of Sports*. He was pst s%s%ymj%sizxyw%fx%fs%fqyjwsfyn j%utwx%tzwsfqnxy%mt%uuqnji%%Sj %fljfuuwtfhm%t%wfinytsfq%utwx%t jwflj3%Mj had voted for **Jill Stein** of the Green Party. Sperl, being largely detached from reality, was not easily flustered by the invective coming kwtr %gtymxni jx3%Gzy%mj%flwjji%nym% j%ynfy%y% fx%kwzxywfyns l%ktw%zx%Lwjjsx %t%nf j%t%qnxyjs%t%fwtzr jsyx%ynfy%ntr uqjyjq miss the main point: that Mother Earth is dying and humans are hastening its demise. I listened politely to his views then gently corrected mr %gtzy%ymj%zx%Lwjjs[redacted]ji %mr %t%ps[redacted]tqynhfq%sjzywfq%ojwj3%

Mj%qtpji%fy% j%mxfuuwt nslq 3%^tz%fsy%Rtymjw%fwym%t%mjl%XufyxD%mj%fxpji l%s%fqq%jwtzxs jxx3%

[redacted]

Ymjwj%mx%st%sjzywfqny%mjs%y%tr jx%t%Rtymjw%fwym%Xufyx3% j%wj%fqq%s%ymx%tl jymjwl %mj%jhqfwji 3

Sperl was right. Not that I agreed that we were destroying the Earth together, but we all certainly share it as home. Just like we all share America as our home. We *are* all in this together and the sooner we find common ground to build on, the better it will be for us all.

TRIBUTE TO MARDUK

[redacted]gjjs%tq%g %sj%k%o %ktzwhjx%nym%mj%qjflzj%mfy%xtr jymsl %fx%qfssji%ktw%Xfyzwf %nlmy%mfy%fx%sty%qnxyji%s%he official calendar of Gale Sayers X events, but which would involve all 13 members of the murky EFL Committee and an invitation-osq%wtzu%k%bzjxy%xmr uq%pst s%fx%kwjsix3%Ymjwj% fx%st%uwtlwfr %t%nxywgzyj%fsi%st%kkmhfq%bzjxy%qnxy%fmqfgqj%gzy%he j jsy%jjr ji% jwl%jw%r utwfsyl% %ktzwhj%sktw ji%j3

I spent Saturday contacting my other sources around the league trying to find out what my source inside the EFL was talking about, but the responses I got provided no viable leads. I did find out, however, that a group of Hall of Fame Alumni along with several EFL team owners and select members of their staffs had reportedly booked the *Diamond Royale*l%f%qthfq%l jsyqjr fs x% hqzgl %ktw%wn fyj%qq-night party on Saturday night.

I also learned that Mission Viejo owner, **Chris Ferraro** fx%ty%s%hfsyts%mx% jjp%ktw%ymj%T sjwx%Ywgzyj%Gwjfpkfxy%os% Sunday morning because he fx%fy%tr j%jfqnsl%nym%%hfxm%kq %wmx%yjr r nsl%wtr %fxn j%jgy%hhwzji%g %mj%tsxywzhytts% of Ferraroland. The opulent theme park had fulfilled its role impressively as the venue for Gale Sayers IX, but public interest and demand for a theme park and convention centre based on medieval Lisbon had turned out to be low. His properties were losing money. I was pointed to an article in the *Orange County Register* that reported that Ferraro had received an official letter from the Government of Portugal formally refuting his claim to the Portuguese Throne. This had had repercussions in the Portuguese Community of Mission Viejo. Tradesmen and artisans who had worked for little or for free on the construction of Ferraroland were now invoicing His Ex-Highness. It was thought that Ferraro would have to sell his team if he did not find a financial solution.

I also found out, sadly, that **Gale Sayers** himself was beginning to exhibit early signs of dementia, thought to have been caused by his pro football career. He apparently kept asking his hosts why his name was posted all over the city. On this issue, the EFL Players Association is reportedly in the early stages of leading an effort to have the EFL reimburse former players for concussion-related injuries suffered while playing professional football. A recent study by UCLA based on autopsies of former NFL ufjwx%gwfnsx%xmt ji%mfy%:%k%%fi%yjxyji%txnyn j%ktw%hmwtsm%wfzr fyn%jshjumfqtufym%HYJ.3%Ymj%LKQ%nqqgj%kd nynsl the lawsuit, claiming that what happened in the NFL is an NFL problem. They add the fact that no similar findings have been made for

former EFL players. This is a disingenuous position as very few former EFL players have died and none are willing to have their brains autopsied while alivj%tw%mj%fpj%l%mj%uqf jwx%qf xzn3%

I heard dozens of other rumours and absorbed some salacious second hand gossip; none of it printable due to lack of htwwgtwfyns l%xtzwhjx%fsi%ymj%qpjqmtti%l%zhm%l%ngjns l%j flljwfyji%w%fqxj3%Gzy%mj%xtr jymns l %ymfy%mfi%gjjs%uqfssji%tw% Saturday suddenly became fair game to mention here when photos emerged Sunday morning of what appears to be a bizarre ceremony in a glade on the shore of Lake Meyers.

The photos appeared in my in-box in the early morning hours of Gale Sayers Sunday accompanied by captions that read: JKQ%Htr r nyjj%l%68%uf x%ywgzyj%t%Rfwizp %R[redacted]yts%l%Gfg qtsnfs%Lti%jfw%Hfsyts %si%Xsfpj%Hzqy%Qn jx3% The unsigned e-mail from peekaboo443@gmail.com read: "Blood Ceremony to Marduk ensures EFL survives another 10 years. Lake **real reason** EFL Championship as played in Canton, Spats" (emphasis in the original).

Okay then' that was as clear as Lake Meyers mud! If anyone can shed any more light on this I am open to further e-mails. In the mean time, I have added the Tribute to Marduk to my list of investigative assignments that, along with the mysterious Cowled Figure, might never be completely solved.

FAWCETT STADIUM

T j[redacted]mfi%f%gwqqfsy%jf%[redacted]jhni j%t%xjqq% %ymhpjy&%jxunyj%ymj%ni jf%utuunsl%syt% %mjfi%fx%f%Jzwjpf%tr jsy% while I laid awake in my no frills hotel room, I did not make the decision lightly. It would mean that, for the first time ever, I would not be sitting in the stands for an EFL Championship. For that to happen at all, let alone at the historic 10th, was a significant loss. Gzy%mj%Hfsyts%Jujwmjshj %mfi%l%tw% jl%stygjjs%f%ufwmhzqfwq%xfymk nsl%sj%yt%ymfy%utnsy%Fkyjw%qtpnsl%fy% %xjfy%s%Xjfy-Xjjpjwl%ymj%ymtzlm%l%xujsinsl%ymj%qfyj%kyjwsttsfsi%fwq%j jsnsl%s%fr j%f %xwjj nsl% %gzyy%kk%fy%ymj%jw%ml mjxy%t int in the stadium, with who-knows-who else beside me, was extremely unappealing. The Canton Brewing Company, on the other hand, was just my kind of place and I had a ticket for game day there tucked away in my luggage. After somberly pondering my choice for five minutes, I got up, showered, put on my Wrecking Balls jersey, and took a cab to Fawcett Stadium.

[redacted]ty%xjj%m%fx%hfqnsl3%Xjqpsl%mhpjyx%fy%sxqfyji%wmhjx%fxs y% %wtkj[redacted]ts3%[redacted]pjji%fy%m%fx%[redacted]fwy3%[redacted]fgtzy to give some poor suffering, ticketless Swordfish fan or Triumph fan a chance to watch history. If they had to pay a little more for it, that would be a moral lesson to them to plan better in the future. In every way I would be helping them out. I got to the stadium



This photo taken on the eve of the 10th EFL Championship purportedly shows members of the EFL Committee engaged in a mysterious fire and blood ceremony around a statue of the Babylonian God, **Marduk**. The source of this photo is unknown, but news accounts of a giant bonfire and chanting near Lake Meyers on Saturday night corroborate that something weird happened.

around 10:30 am. The game was still 6 hours away but there were already crowds of fans milling around. The scalpers were not hard to find. They swarmed all of the cabs as they pulled up, asking if the occupants had tickets to sell. The police looked on impassively, seemingly indifferent to it.

Something told me I should not immediately volunteer that I had a ticket to sell. I shook my head at a meaty, balding fellow in a dirty cloth jacket who was the first to stake out my cab as it pulled up to the curb. I got out and brushed off a sharp-tongued, thin man with a pale and drawn complexion who got a little too close. I moved through the swarm as if I had pressing business to attend to. As I pulled away, somebody made a wisecrack about my Wrecking Balls jersey.

I found a spot away from all the traffic and surveyed the scene. There was a knot of Triumph fans decked out in horned helmets in the parking lot across from McKinley High School who were chanting *"Tri-Umph! Tri-Umph! Tri-Umph!*, between swigs of liquor. Small groups of Swordfish fans, a few wearing giant plastic bills on their noses, milled around, most likely looking for tickets. The official Championship tailgating site was on the other side of Highway 77 in the Canton Garden Centre but that had not deterred fans from wandering all over the place and taking over the roads, parking lots and sidewalks around the stadium.

Trucks carrying equipment for the **Bruce Springsteen** concert at half time rolled in as I looked in vain for a respectable-looking scalper to buy my ticket. The thought occurred to me that I should sell it directly to a fan, but I only had one ticket and just fgtzy%j jwgti %uujfwji%x%gj%s%%wtzu%ws%fnwX%js%%%tr jgti %fqpsl% %fr j3%Xufyx&%%

%pjji%fwtzsi%fsi%f %i%z %s%f%Ufywtyx%jwxj % fqpsl%s% %nwjhytsJ%t was **Charlie Wood**. Behind him was **Johnny Rebb** s%mx%Wjlzqfytwx%fu%fsi%wj %Htskji jwfyj%nsyj%tfy%ji%zy%nfy%mj %fi%fi%mj%fr j%ajf3

j%tr ufwji%hpjyx3%Hmfwqjx%fx%%tx%ts%wtr %nsj%fsi%Qnss x%fx%s%mj%fr j%gfhp%tr %x%nsjl but 12 seats away. They each had a face value of $350.00 ' ymj%mjfujxy%jfyx%s%mj%%jw%t %fs %k%mj%ymjwx%f j%jfyx%s%mj%xfr j%jfl%%3%

%js%%% %sfr j%lfns3%Xufyx&%fyx&%%pjji%fwtzsi%fsi%f %i%z %jfwsl%%gqfhp Convicts jersey jogging in our direction. It was **Quentin San Pedro**. Behind him, wearing a pair of horns on his head and a burgundy Hellfire jersey was **Randy the Desert Rat**. It turned out that they had had the same idea and were looking to sell their tickets.

mfy%x%tns%%D%%pjj3%jjvgti %jqpsl%mjnw%hpjyxD

%pst %fgtzy%j jwgti %gzy%%jjmx%hpjy%t%mj%Hfsyts%Gwj nsl%Htr ufs %Lfqj%f jwx%%Ufy%nfy%%yt%zxjl%fsx jwji%Vzjsyns3

It turned out that all five of us had received Canton Brewing Company tickets from our waitresses this past Thursday night. **Charlie Wood** had been so drunk that he had typed in 150% instead of 15% when prompted by the card reader. Leanne had stuffed the ticket into his pocket as Aristedes had led him out of the bar. I laughed and told him I had punched in 100% instead of 10%.

65* D&%**Randy the Desert Rat** gfwpji3%^ tz wj%sj%mjfu%gfxyfwl%Xufyx&%%

Randy had deliberately tipped Jennifer 50% on a $180.00 tab, putting $90 in her pocket. He had an open-ended expense account for the championship game. The *Mohave Torch* was not bothering to cut budgetary corners, believing that wall-building in their area was about to boom very soon and would be good for business.

I noted that the animosity between the two pairs of journalists, being on opposite sides of the US Election had, for the moment, disappeared. They had found common cause in getting rid of their tickets in a socially-responsible manner. Well, everybody except Randy, who wanted to dump them on the scalpers waiting outside. Jennifer pointed out to Randy that whatever we squeezed from the scalpers would, in turn, be squeezed from the public.

mt%fwjxD%mj%juqqji3%Ymj wj%tnsl%t%vzjj j%jr %fs f 3

Randy was overruled by the group and thought better of striking out to sell his ticket on his own. The scalpers were swarming the area like piranhas and it was unsafe for any of us to meet them alone. We agreed that whatever we would do, we would agree to it, and do it, *together*. After scouting the area as a group for about 30 minutes we finally spotted what appeared to be f%wtzu%k%n j%fsx%xyfsinsl%sjfw%mj%xyfinzr %hpjy%nsit x3%Ymwjj%k%mjr % jwj% jfwsl%mnyj% %jwxj xl%sj%f%yjfq% %jwxj l%fsi%fs%qjw%fs%f%gwlmy%qzj%fsi%wfslj%wfltsx%jwxj %nym% %wfr ji%s%mj%gfhp%s% white block letters. They looked grim.

%fhmji%mj%qjw%fs%fsi%tr r jsyji%s%mx%wfltsx%jwxj 3%Mj%qttpji%fy% j%xpjuyhfqx3%%zhji% xjqkfx% st y%%hfqujw%zxy%fs%qj%wfltsx%fs3%Mj%jqf ji%gn%fsi%swtizhji%mr xjqkfx%Wg3%Mj%fx%wtr %wfsit%fsi%fi%shj%fi season tickets to the Florida Dragons. He was with his son-in-law, daughter and teenage grandson and granddaughter. Their ijhrxts%t%wf jqy%Hfsyts%fi%gjjs%%qfxy%nszyj%sj%fsi%mj%ir nyji%mfy%n%fi%gjjs%%grl%nxyfpj3%Js%mj%hfqujw% ere xyfwnsl%twy%hpjyx%fsi%mj % jwj%jr fsinsl%nsxfsj %uwhjx%twy%mj%kj %mj %fi3%%js%%%fwn ji%mj%fr nq%nfd just been discussing whether or not to go back to their hotel in Cleveland and watch the game there.

%pjji%y%mj%ymjwx3%Wfsi %xntt p%mx%jfi%st %gzy%mj%ymjwx%t t%%wp3%%pjj%Wg%t%fny%mjwj%%nszyj%mmj%y the journalists aside to yfqp%wfyjl 3% jqq%mfy%t%tz%z x%%pD%%pjj3%Ymj %jjr %nhj%stzlm3

Xufyxl%n j% j%%gwjfp&%mj %fwjs y%tnsl%t%gj%gqj%t%kktw%mjxj%hpjyx&%Wfsi %xufy3%Ymj %f %gj%nhj%stzlm%gzy% ymj wj%qxt%xzuni%t%tr j%ajwj%nym%t%wllns%%fs3%%j%fpj%mjr %f %zw%whj%w%mj wj%mcy%zy%k%qzhp&

Mj l%Wfsi l%%qy%k%ajtuqj%ajwj%ts y%f j%%qfsl%%**Johnny Rebb** htzsyjwji3%Mt %fs %ajtuqj%st %mfy%Kf hjyy

[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]

Yfpj%zx%yt%she Canton Brewing Company! *Now&*%tw ijwji%Wfsi l%mx%r nqyfw%gfhplwtzsi%htr nsl%yt%ymj%ktwj3%Ymj% authority in his voice spurred the taxi driver to wrench the car into gear and put his foot to the floor. The tires squealed as the cab took off. There was a thud and a scream of rage as one of the scalpers leaped onto the hood and slid off. I looked over my shoulder. A short red-headed scalper with a giant nose ring was running after us and was somehow gaining on the cab.

Kfxyjw&%Wfsi %gfwpji 3

The taxi sped uu%gzy%ymj%qlmy%mjfi%fx%yzwsnsl%r gjw3% j%tzqis y% fpj%x3%tsl%qfsp %xhfqujw% jfwnsl%%gqfhp%wjshm% coat and a long stocking cap joined the other one chasing us. His stride was long and his pace was quick. He was bound to catch us.

Gqt %ymj%qlmy& Randy ordered.

Ymj%f n%wn jw%nis y%ymsp%s mhj3%Mj%wt j%wlmy%mwtzlm%ymj%ji%qlmy3%Hfw%xqfr ji%s%ymjnwgwfpjx3%Uji jxywfsx%zr uji% back onto the sidewalk. The cab driver dodged a cyclist crossing our path. The sound of horns and the yelling of pedestrians filled the air. I looked back. The two scalpers had stopped and were standing on the sidewalk shaking their fists in our direction. Then we turned a corner and they were out of view. We were safe...for now.

THE GAME

What was normally a 10-minute cab ride from Fawcett Stadium to the Canton Brewing Company took us 30 minutes in the Gale Sayers Game traffic. Had the scalpers known our destination they would certainly have caught up to us by 25th Street.

The cab driver obviously thought we were cra 3%Mj%fni%mj%tzqi%fpj%x%ymjwj%wjj%k%mfwljw%% j%nis y%zwy%mr 3

Qttp%gwtymjwl%Vzjsys%fni3%Mj%hfqjji%mr %gwtymjw%gjhfzxj%ymj%hfg%wn jw%qttpji%ufwy%Mnxufsnh3%Stgti x%tnsl%yt% hurt you. Do we look like the kind of people who would hurt you?

The cab driver, Fernando, had thought we had robbed the scalpers. And he was scared to death of Randy. But after we had explained the whole story to him he actually laughed.

^tz%wnji%yt%xjqfy%hpjyx%si jw%ymj%txj%k%ymj%hfqujwxD%mj%ttyji3%Gt l%tz%z x%mf j%gfqfx&

j%zxy%nis y%w%yt%xjqfy%mjr % j%tqi%ymjr &%Wfsi %gwfll ji3%Mj%zwsji%yt% j3%Qjy% j%xjj%ymj%js jqtujl%Xufyx&%%

I gulped. Randy had seen Karen counting money from an envelope but had not seen the final moments of the exchange; an exchange that had not been completed.

[redacted] y%n6 j%yl %[redacted] yjjpq 3% [redacted] y%mjr %mj%yhpjyx3

Ymj%hfg% jsy%tyfqi%xqjsy3% js%Kjwfsit%mjqi%mx%gwjfwm3%F%gqfsp%qttp%hfr j% jw%Wfsi x%khj3%Mj%xfwji%fy% j%qpj%f% wax statue. It occurred to me at that moment that Randy had been in special ops and had once bragged that he could kill a man with the straw from a juice box. I wondered if this was the look Randy gave people he was about to kill with the straw from a juice box.

In a voice barely audibqj%mx%qux%mfwiq %t nsl%Wfsi %xpji ?%Why..did...you... give... her... the... yhpjyx%Xufyx&

My voice cracking from sudden onset dryness, I explained to everybody what had happened at the scene of the deal. When I had finished there was another uncomfortably long period of silence. It was broken by **Charlie Wood**.

Tmrrr 3Lti &%Hmfwqj%fni%s%%znjy%tmhj3%Mj%xfwyji%yt%xf %tr jymnsl%jqxj%gzy%fx%syjwzuyji 3

Ymfy%fx%mhj%k%tzl%Xufyx&%Vzjsys%gwtpj%s3%^tz%nis y%xp%x%k%y%fx%pf l%mherefore breaking our agreement, but it fx%yqf%mhj%k%tz3

Johnny Rebb started to say something but was cut short by a sudden outburst from **Randy the Desert Rat**?%Stl%y%fx% *not* nice! It was stupid! S-T-U-P-D....*stupid*&%Wfsi %jqjji3%Mj%qttpji%y% j3The death stare was gone and had been replaced with a wide-j jil%mxji%gwt %qttp%k%zwfljl%gfkqjr jsy3%^tz%hyzfqi%xjqf%kwymj%r -daddy-is-dying-of-cancer-and-this-is-his-last-lfr j%whp&%[redacted]p&%[redacted]j%ytp%tz%kwl%%tr uqjyj%ttqfj% jsy%mtzlm%tz twj%mfy% pnsl%ttq%xzny%fxy%jfw&%%

For the rest of the cab ride we argued. **Johnny Rebb** hfr j%yt% %jkjshjl%fxxjwnsl%mfy%mj%kfr nq x%ytw% fx%wtgfgq% ywzj%fsi%mfy%Xufyx% fi j%%zil jr jsy%hfqf%sijw%wjxxzwj %nym%mj%xhfqujwx% t nsl%s%yt%gwjfp%y%zu3%Vzjsys%flwjji%nym%Qtnss x% assessment, but as a reformed convict he had become highly sensitive to matters of honour and felt that I had to do something to r fpj%u%twgwjfpnsl% %t %yt%ktqf %mj%wtzu x%nxmjx3%Hmfwqj%zxy%mttp%mx%mjfi%gfhk-and-forth. It was hard to tell what he thought' r f gj%mj%nis y%st %nfy%mj%mtzlmy3%Gzy%s%mj%jsi%mj%lwjj[redacted]%mjr %qf%gjjw%fy%qjfxy3

Poor Randy went through all five stages of grief. He kept referring to the figure $10,000 as he alternately cried, cursed feigned indifference and threatened to kill me. I knew that if he was just threatening me, I was safe. (If Randy intended to kill you he was unlikely to give you any warning). I had to keep remindinl%mr %mfy% j%fis y%lwjji%t%xjqf%mj%yhpjyx%kwj651555l%gzy%mj% had become fixated on the figure, as that was the amount he *knew* we could have gotten for them.

By the time we reached the Canton Brewing Company it was agreed that I would pay for the drinks and the cab ride. Everyone was responsible for their own food. Randy could hardly look at me but agreed to drop the matter for the remainder of the day. After all, we each had a football game to write about

The Speakeasy was packed. Regular tickets, long since sold out, cost $100 ' a steep price to watch a game on TV, but it included a free buffet and door prizes. A couple of fresh-faced, well-endowed hostesses greeted us at the door, handing out Canton Brewing Company GSX hats and selling tickets for the 50-50 draw. I bought one just to spend a little more time enjoying the view.

Seating was first come-first served. The only thing that had gone totally right for us so far that day was the fact that we were among the first in the door and were able to grab seats near the cornhole boards and in front of one of the giant screens. The pre-game show was already underway. ESPN was in the middle of reviewing the highlights of the previous nine Gale Sayers

Games. Currently they were reviewing GSVI. I watched as ***Jordy Nelson*** caught a strike over the middle from ***Eli Manning*** and zig- fl l ji %ymvtzl m%ymj% s i jwyfpjwx%xjhts i fw%ktwf%86-yard touchdown. I remembered the play well. The Undertakers had been gunning for ***DeAngelo Williams*** on the play. Left alone, their secondary, suspect all season, was unable to handle the speedy Nelson in space. The North Stars had come out of nowhere that year and had ruined record-setting season by containing him ns%ymj%Hmfr urts xmu3?R fs %wfhji%ymj%zwwjs y%zwnfr %zfwyjwgfhp x%gradual decline back to this game.

R %fnywjxxl%Ojs s nkjw%uujfwji% nymns%f% ns zyj%si% fqpji%xwfrl my% jw%t% j3%Mjqtttt l %xmj%[redacted]%tz% yti f 3% mfy% tzqi%tz%qpj%t%ws pD

I ordered a pint of *Tuscora* and told her that I was covering the tabs for all five of us. She brightened up even more at this news as she envisioned a large bill and another 100% tip at the end of the night.

We soon settled in as the bar quickly filled up with football fans of all stripes. Despite the talk of small market Sebastian not being well-wjuwjxjsyji%s%Hfsyts l%f%ojwxj %tqq%ij jfqji%ynfy%mjwj% jwj%hqtxj%t%x% fs %X twkxm%kfsx%s%mj%gfw%x%mjwj% were Triumph fans. They were not nearly as loud, however. Winning was a new concept for them and they were still learning to be obnoxious. I scanned the room for any other familiar faces. It looked like it was just the five of us so far. It felt strange. I was fhhzxytr ji%t%of ns l%ymj%mtqj%fs l%[redacted]%nxx%fgg x%s fs j%tr r jsyfw%si%ojfs x%sxnlmykzl asides in particular.

The good news was that talk of politics had ended and we were making new acquaintances. A group of accountants from St. Paul were on one side of us and a sports fisherman and his wife, a maritime lawyer, from Vero Beach were on the other. These ujtuqj% jwj%wtgfgq%stw fq%ujwnfux%j js%zqq%tw8; %f x%k%ymj%jfw3%zy%tif %mj % jwj%qq%jhpji%zy%s%qfxxn%xzujr-kfs % garb and carrying on like lunatics. Aileen, the lawyer, was wearing a giant blue swordfish bill over her nose that kept hitting me when she turned her head around. Her husband, Ben, was dressed up as Aquaman, with the addition of a large foam Swordfish helmet. The accountants were from Redpath and Company ' a reputable firm. The six of them were dressed like a Viking raiding ufwy l%gzy%mj % jwj%ufns yji%gqzj% ny%ltqi%Yx%s%ymjnwhmjxyx3?Ymjwj% fx% t wj%k%ymj%fr j%hfyjwji%fwtzsi%mj%gfw%fqtsl%with fans of other teams who were just in town for the party. I made the rounds and talked to strangers. The consensus was that the Canton Brewing Company was *the* uqfhj%t%gj%k%tz% jwjs y%y%mj%yfi nzr %yxjqk3%

Ynr j%[redacted]%tsrh %**Phil Winterall** and **Bill Badden**, people stopped milling around the bar and returned to their tables. The tension was building in the room as the music was turned down and the TV volume turned up.

S ts j%k%ymj%n j%k%x%fi%xpns%s%ymj%fr j %mjwjl%gzy%jfhm%k%x%fi%uzy%zw%jux%s%ymj%qns j% nym%uzgqnxmji%wwjinhyts% for the final. As you know, I had been unequivocal in my prediction of a Triumph victory. I was all but certain of it. The only thing that made me pause was the possibility of the Swordfish limiting ***Antonio Brown***. If somehow they managed to do that, I felt that ***Carlos Dunlap*** and ***Chandler Jones*** would be able to get to ***Carson Palmer*** and wreak havoc. I thought this scenario was unlikely on the balance of probabilities, but it was not a *remote* possibility.

Quentin San Pedro had also predicted a Triumph victory, for different reasons. He expected the Swordfish to shut down Brown and ***Doug Martin*** to take over the game for the Triumph. He also expected ***Andy Dalton*** to shy away from the elite Triumph corners and try to throw the ball short to his running backs and tight end, which would slow his offence down. Although he thought the Triumph would win, he was cheering for the Swordfish kwymj%r uqj%ijfxts[redacted]%qpj%ymj%Ywzr uml %mj%fri 3

Charlie Wood had gone on record predicting a Sebastian win. He had seen the Triumph twice this year and had not been t jwq%r uwjxjji3%[redacted]ts y%st %t %ymj % jsy%; -51 %mj%fri%x% j%qtpji%y%%wfumh%s%ymj%hwjjs%xnt nsl%ymj%Ywzr umx%



Bruce Springsteen and the E Street Band perform *'Born in the USA'* at Fawcett Stadium in Canton during the 10th EFL Championship Game, also known as Gale Sayers X. Sringsteen s set, consisting of seven full length songs, turned into the longest half time show in EFL history. **Jeff Cohen**, co-owner of the New Jersey Wrecking Balls, can be seen off stage in the background .

mnx%o nhwtu s j%ov %j% . Jeff was one of their own and he was, at that moment, being viewed by millions across the globe.

Everyone stood up in the bar and applauded when **Gale Sayers** came onto the field for the coin flip. It always amazes me when people watching television or at a movie act as if they are at a live event. To be fair, the digital screens at the Canton Brewing Company were of highest quality and the camera work was the best I had ever seen for a sporting event. This gave the broadcast a j%jGzy j%sl%o u b %

Gale did a good job flipping the coin but the official coin flip caller, one of the field judges, apparently called it wrong. This hw g.

n%%o t i &%jhqf njiH%lmf%%%jd%fl jh

Right off the bat I knew this game was going to be a bit of a circus. Two of the boldest/most aggressive coaches in the league were going at each other with loaded teams. **Guy Williams** put his hands team on the field to receive the opening kickoff. **Russ em n** response was to squib kick the ball. Nothing about these opening moves made much sense unless you understood that they were both popping blood vessels trying to outguess each other. An onside kick to open the game was not beyond **Russ Lemmon** ' he had never done one, but his reputation was such that you could never be sure he woq y Yj%t s xj% ffy it l f ***Shane Vereen*** picking up another 8 to give them respectable field position at the 24 yard line. A lot of posturing, it seemed, for 24 yards net.

The opening drive betrayed big game jitters for both teams. The Triumph looked gun-shy and the Swordfish looked amped up. Although the Fish appeared out of position on every snap they still managed to get to the ball and make plays, adrenaline flowing through their veins at dangerous levels. A roar of excitement accompanied a sack and fumble of ***Carson Palmer*** by ***Sharrif Floyd*** on 3rd & 10. It subsided when it was revealed that Palmer had recovered the ball. Disaster had been averted but the Triumph were punting ' not exactly the start they had in mind when they chose to receive the ball.

pR xfw jwtw **Johnny Rebb3%fw** jw j jhy mj%z w

The pressure off, the Swordfish offence came out loose with guns blazing. ***Andy Dalton*** threw long on the second play, hitting ***Doug Baldwin*** for a 23-yard gain. With the thought of the deep ball now in the back of their heads, the Triumph defence were content to give up small gainers underneath, biding time until the offence made a mistake; which they did. A sack of Dalton by an unblocked ***William Gholston*** qttpji%qppj%ny%tzqi%xmzy%t s%Xjgfxyfs x%ujsnsl%wnj3Gzy%Qjr r ts%pjuy%mx%kkjshj%s%ymj% field on 4th & 5 at the Triumph 45. Gambles like these, although defensible in theory, had the potential to backfire more severely when the stakes were high. A stop by the Triumph defence would certainly galvanize their offence ' an offence that the season had shown did not require a lot of galvanizing. But the Swordfish gamble worked; Dalton hit ***Danny Amendola*** on a simple crossing pattern for an 8-yard gain.

Fmjjs%xmwjpji%fsi%zr uji%zy%k%wjwhmfnv%^ JJJJ XXX&%

Qjr r ts%x%qjf nsl%y%qq%s%ymj%xnjqi l%**Quentin San Pedro** wjr fvpji3%Ymj%Xwzr um%f js y%fi%t%jfq%nym%htfhmqpj% ymx%gjktwj3

But the Triumph defence did not break. They stopped Baldwin one yard short of the first down, bringing up 4th & 1 at the 28 yard line. I knew that if 4th & 5 near mid-field was considered fair game for the Fish, 4th & 1 at uncertain field goal range would be a no-brainer. Sure enough they went for it and got it, with ***Justin Forsett*** charging through the line for a 4-yard gain. Frustration was beginning to show on the Triumph side of the ball.

And then it happened: the play of the game. , the Triumph defensive MVP, split the gap between y t%qns jr js%fsi%xytw ji%yt fwi%fqyts l%htqpi nsl% nym%mr f%xuqp%xjhtsi%fkyjw%mj%wjqjfxji%ymj%gfqp3Fsxfm%knsmxmji%mx%yfhpqj % iwnsl%fqyts x%uujw%gti %xsyt%mj%yzwk%fxyjw%mfs%mx%ucfsy%qjl%htzqi%fiozxy3%fqyts x%psjj%gjsy%p fwiq%fxhe went down. He stayed down.

Ben banged his head on the table, his foam Swordfish helmet absorbing most, but not all, of the blow. Groans issued forth from Swordfish fans throughout the bar. A few of the drunker Triumph fans cheered until they realized, for certain, that Dalton was really hurt. They too paused and watched as trainers worked on the clearly agonized Swordfish quarterback. They collectively tip-yt ji%ymj% twfq%ns j%qs j%gjy jjs%fsynsl%fqyts%zy%k%mj%fr j%fsi%ntunsl%mfy%mj%fxs y%xjwtzxq%nzwy3%

Dalton was hurt badly enough to require transportation off the field. The full severity of the damage would not be known until tests were run, but it was obvious he would not be returning to the game.

Tmss3st &%ms ji%Hmfwqnj% tti3%Ymj%X twirknm%wj%ts j&

[redacted]%ps t %gtzy%mfyl %fzyts ji%**Johnny Rebb**3% nsxyts%x%%wjfy%gfhp-up. He could probably start for half the teams ns%ymj%xjflzj3

Jameis Winston had had a fine year as back-up to the oft-injured Dalton. A small minority of Swordfish fans, judging from e j[redacted]i%fsi%xjfwirl%fhyzfqp %wjkjwji%mr %yt%fqyts%x%ymj%xfwjw3%Ymjwj%fx%st%xjfxts%jy%yt%ymw %s%ymj%yt jq%if you jwj%uzqpsl%twXjgfxyfs3%Gzy%y%mfi%fqxt%gjjs%hqjf%kwr %fqyts x%jr jfstzw%s%ymj%ujsnsl%wnj%ymfy%mj%fx%st%fkwri%f the excellent Triumph corners. He had been composed in the pocket and very accurate with his throws. In admittedly limited action he mfi%qtpji%ts3% tzqi% nsxyts%gj%xmr nfwq%qthpji%sD

It was a question that would have to wait until the next Swordfish possession to be answered. Winston handed off twice to ***CJ Anderson*** for runs behind right tackle ***Morgan Moses***, finishing off the drive with a 6-yard TD run. Fans of the Fish cheered, their quarterback worries temporarily forgotten.

Ymfy%X twirknm%kkjsxn j%qs j%x%zxmsl%gfhp%ymj%Xwzr um%qs jl %**Randy the Desert Rat** tgxj[redacted]tz%mj %zs%ymj% gfqp%t s%mjnw%mwfyx%ymj%wjxy%k%ymj%f 3

Ymj %rlmy%f j%t%mtrhjl%fr jsyji%**Charlie Wood**. In addition to not wanting the Triumph to post a perfect campaign before the Patriots had, Charlie had placed a large bet on the Swordfish by phone through a friend in Vegas after imbibing a pint of Hfsyts x%s%[redacted]gqj%[redacted]gjjw a 653 * %G % tsxyjw%mfy%zxzfqp%jsi ji%ujtuqj x%snlmyx3%Gzy% nym%Hmfwqnj%y%ad merely made him irrationally tipsy.

Palmer was intercepted by linebacker ***Paul Posluszny*** yt%gwsl%ymj%Xwzr umx%xjhtsi%utxxjxxts%yt%fs%fgwzuy%jsi%fy%ymj% Swordfish 43 yard line. Swordfish fans exploded with joy at the turnover. With Dalton out, this was the kind of break they would need to keep the initiative.

Ufqr jw%zhpx&%**Randy the Desert Rat** hissed.

Htr j%sl%Wfsi &%**Quentin San Pedro** hmzhpqji3%Mj%sq %mwj %7%tzhmi t s%ufxxjx%mx%jfw%3%Mj x%st%*that* gfi &

Palmer had finished first in TD passes and second in QB rating, behind Dalton, to build a strong case for Offensive MVP. While ***Antonio Brown*** got most of the accolades, many Triumph experts claimed that Twin Cities would not be in the final without Palmer. The point was hard to argue, considering nobody could picture a ***Jay Cutler***-led Triumph making it past the first round of the playoffs.

The Swordfish made short work of the Triumph defence on the ensuing drive. This was due to the punishing work of their offensive line and the running of Anderson and Forsett; who finished it off with a 25-yard touchdown run off right tackle. Swordfish boosters hooted with glee. Forsett, hardly touched on the run, had made it look easy. The first quarter ended with Sebastian in front 14-5%si%ymjnwkfsx%ri i %nym%jo hmj[redacted]js y2%[redacted]s y%mjqu%gzy%t%mf j%stynhji l%t j jwl%mfy% nsxyts%mfi%ty%ompleted a pass

downfield on the drive. He looked a little tentative in the pocket. Perhaps he would settle in, but the early signs were concerning.

The Triumph responded to the Swordfish with a punt to start the second quarter. One had the feeling that if Winston could lead his team to another score on this possession, the Triumph would start to panic and the Swordfish defensive ends, quiet until that point, would be unleashed. But a three-and-out in which Winston missed two easy throws gave Twin Cities a temporary reprieve.

[illegible] **Johnny Rebb** [illegible] in reference to the 24-0 whitewash of the Regulators in Week 14.

[illegible] **Randy the Desert Rat** [illegible]

The Triumph offence finally made its presence known with a 65-yard touchdown drive. ***Doug Martin*** administered the *coup de grace* with a 4-yard touchdown run. But the play of the drive was a 4th & 12 completion to Brown for a 15-yard gain to the Sebastian 20 yard line. **Guy Williams** had outdone **Russ Lemmon's** 4th & 5 with a 4th & 12 that nobody had seen coming. The Swordfish had flooded the field with 7 defensive backs, but Brown easily found the hole in the zone and Palmer was perfectly on target with his throw. The accountants to our right, who had been very behaving very accountant-like while the Triumph had been struggling, went berserk. "TRI-*UMPH*! TRI-*UMPH*! TRI-*UMPH*!" they chanted as they stood and waved plastic swords and axes.

The Swordfish mounted a push in response to the Triumph score, but after some success running the ball, the drive fizzled with three straight incomplete passes and a holding penalty on Moses. ***Adam Vinatieri*** came on and missed the 54-yard field goal attempt. The momentum was gradually shifting away from the Swordfish, but it re-set in their favour when Triumph kicker ***Robert Aguayo***, a fourth round pick in the rookie draft, missed an easy 32-yarder with time running down in the first half.

[illegible] **Randy the Desert Rat** [illegible]

Randy was getting drunk and it was not improving his earlier bad mood. As the first half ended he stormed off to the washroom, stopping briefly to say something to our waitress, Jennifer. Within minutes another round of drinks arrived for the entire table. I stopped Jennifer and asked who had ordered these.

[illegible]

CHAMPIONSHIP MVPS

I – 2007
LaDainian Tomlinson
Chino Convicts

II-2008
Will Witherspoon
Florida Dragons

III-2009
DeAngelo Williams
Florida Dragons

IV – 2010
Chris Johnson
Pickering Spartans

V – 2011
Josh Freeman
Los Angeles Knights

VI – 2012
Eli Manning
Markham North Stars

VII – 2013
Jacoby Jones
Charleswood Patriots

VIII – 2014
Brandon Boykin
Aurora Mustangs

IX – 2015
Lamar Miller
Charleswood Patriots

X – 2016
Antonio Brown
Twin Cities Triumph

The Honour Roll of EFL Champion MVPs. ***Antonio Brown*** takes a deserved place at #10.

[illegible]

The half time show featuring **Bruce Springsteen** and the ***E Street Band*** [illegible] lengthy set, which included mega-hits such as *Born to Run*, *Glory Days*, *I'm On Fire* and *Dancing in the Dark*. But he also played the lesser known *Wrecking Ball* as a tribute to his new team and a classic from his first album, *Blinded by the Light*. He finished with *Born in the USA* [illegible] as not all of them, just the ones I counted. Logistical challenges in moving the stage off the field added further delays. Half time had lasted more than one hour – which was good for the bar, but not necessarily the patrons and certainly not for the 27,500 freezing fans at Fawcett Stadium. As my mind melted a little more over another pint of *Topaz American IPA* I felt that giving away my tickets had been the right decision.

Then I suddenly remembered that I was to have met Gabby at the Fawcett Club in the stadium at half time! She had somehow finagled a ticket to the interior press box, meaning that we would not be watching the game together. I had felt bad for

missing lunch twice, so I had absent-mindedly agreed to the meeting via text on Saturday while I was trying to track down sources for the Tribute to Marduk story. I noticed that my *Blackberry* was flashing red. With dread, I unlocked it. There were over 40 [illegible] i hate you!

Oh well, there's nothing I can do about it now, I thought. Reflexively, I called over Jennifer and ordered another beer. She saw that I looked distressed and asked if everything was alright.

I [illegible] with both the question and the familiarity with which I addressed her.

She looked taken aback at the question. But she recovered quickly; she had obviously been asked this before by people [illegible]

The second half of the game was not exactly a blur, but my recollection of the action is somewhat dreamlike. It was as if I was observing the action from a higher plane of existence. The specific play results mattered less than how the players looked playing the game. It was as if I was tuned into the spirit of the sport, a deeper part of the action that was not obvious to everyone [illegible] were immediately articulable for me. When people [illegible]

The Swordfish opened the third quarter with a field goal drive that put them ahead 17-7. On the surface this looked good for them, but the way they had moved the ball did nothing to make me confident that they could put points on the board if they really needed to. A good kick return, 20 yards in penalties against the Triumph, and a long run by ***Kenneth Dixon*** put them in field goal position, but the passis l%yfhp%jr fns ji%s%jzwfq3% nsxyts x%gti %fslzflj%fx%ty%tti3%*He's scared sh^&tless*, I thought.

[illegible] torn up opposing defences all season on their first possession of the second half. Brown caught three easy passes and ***Charles Clay*** turned a short slant into a 16-yard touchdown play. The Sebastian lead had shrunk to 17-14.

I heard **Charlie Wood** [illegible]

The Swordfish defensive strategy was unclear until you realized ' as I did in my altered state ' that **Russ Lemmon** was trying to be unpredictable, hoping to catch the Triumph off guard and make a big play. He had eschewed the common strategy of doggedly double-teaming ***Antonio Brown*** and had opted to rotate double teams and gamble on stopping the run at moments where [illegible] some of these off balance play calls, but the odds of them continuing to stop the Triumph while they were out of position were slim. The run keys especially had held back his two killer defensive ends, ***Carlos Dunlap*** and ***Chandler Jones***. In summary, the Swordfish were all over the map defensively.

On the Triumph side of the ball, things were exactly the opposite. **Guy Williams** had stuck with the same defensive formation throughout, tenaciously double-teaming ***Odell Beckham Jr*** on every single play. This approach had the potential to be suicidal against a well-balanced offence like the Swordfish. But the Swordfish offence under Winston was no longer a well-balanced offence. The running game had been effective but the passing game was hamstrung. Still, the Swordfish persisted in trying to establish a presence through the air and kept getting shot down.

The Triumph missed a chance to tie the game toward the end of the third quarter when Aguayo missed another easy field goal. I sensed the kid was, like Winston, terrified. He was tense from head to toe. But his reaction to his second miss was interesting ' he did not hang his head or throw his helmet. He walked off the field with a steely, straightforward glare. He was angry.

The missed field goal was quickly forgotten. The Triumph burned through the Sebastian defence on the opening drive of the fourth quarter and took a 21-17 lead on a 7-yard TD pass to Brown. The Swordfish had been in a run posture and Brown had easily shaken Swordfish corner ***Delvin Breaux*** loose to get wide open for the easy toss from Palmer

[illegible] **Randy the Desert Rat** [illegible]

Nobody in my group knew for sure. Fred, one of the accountants from St. Paul ' the one with the spear ' had been tracking Brown ' that was his job for this game. Each of them had numbers to keep track of during the game. They would pool them afterwards to see if they matched the official score sheet. That was what football fans who were accountants considered fun. [illegible]

[illegible]

Actually, Breaux had been holding his own against the top receiver in the league. With few exceptions, he had been close to Brown all game. As much as Brown was getting open, Palmer was also throwing him open. Few corners had been able to cover Brown all year. It was universally acknowledged that even the best of them needed safety help on passing downs. Breaux was [illegible]

[illegible]

[redacted]y%s jji%fs%fhhtzsyfsy%t%yjqq%r j% ymfyx%Ti jqqx%kwxy%nfyhm%ik%ymj%lfr j1%**Quentin San Pedro** quipped.

He looked to go to Beckham again on the next play, but when he saw the lane underneath covered he took off running and gained 13 yards and a first down. For the first time since the opening drive of the first quarter the Triumph defence looked to be back on its heels while, for the first time all game, Winston had a touch of swagger in his step. *This drive will end well*, I thought.

I was right (of course!). Anderson ripped off another nice run and Winston finished it off with a short pass over the middle to a wide open Baldwin for a 10-yard touchdown pass. Swordfish fans in the bar who had been pouting in their beer suddenly rose up and roared their approval. In addition to regaining the lead, tactically the TD pass was a big win for Winston and the Swordfish. The perfect pass to Baldwin had exposed the weakness in the Triumph defence. It was just a matter of making the play; and if Winston had really overcome his nerves, he would make that play again.

The Triumph surged back with a couple of passes to ***Rishard Matthews*** and another one to Brown, but they hit a snag at the Swordfish 36 yard line, where Martin was stuffed for a 4-yard loss by Dunlap and the next two passes fell incomplete. It looked like they would have to punt but, incredibly, **Guy Williams** kept his offence on the field for 4th & 14 at the Swordfish 40.



Swordfish coach **Russ Lemmon** (left) and Triumph coach **Guy Williams** (right) greet each other at mid-field after the Triumph win in GSX.



Jennifer, my waitress at the Canton Brewing Company, poses for a photo.

nfy%ymj%k cp%fwj%ymj %tnslD%**Randy the Desert Rat** was incredulous. He had visions of a Swordfish stop and, with a little more than five minutes remaining in the game, the running out of the clock.

Ymj wj%fpnsl%hmfwj%k%ymj%[redacted]jwji1% nymtzy%j js% thinking. My sixth sense was working overtime.

With everyone in the bar knowing where the ball was going, **Russ Lemmon** did the unthinkable and sent Breaux on a corner blitz. He did it *because* it was unthinkable and therefore likely to catch the Triumph by surprise. But the little Breaux was immediately picked up by the tight end ***Tyler Eifert***, nullifying him. The subsequent coverage mismatch of safety ***Walter Thurmond*** on the best receiver in the league resulted in an 18-yard completion to Brown and a first down. The Triumph fans bellowed in satisfaction. Swordfish fans expressed disgust.

nfy% are' they' *DOING*D%**Charlie Wood** screeched, on the jwj%k%yjfwx3%Mt %fs%ymj %ty%t jw%wnsymjwjD

Ymj%X twkxm%fwj%fr gqnsl%gnl%yr j1 %**Johnny Rebb** observed. Xt%kfwymj j%tr j%u%sfpj%j jx%j jw%yr j3

The incredible fourth down conversion almost came for not when Palmer fumbled the snap two plays later. But the ball was bouncing ymj%wzr umx%f %st %si%ymj%nl xpns%fr j%gfhp%u%sy t%fq jwx%fwr x3% One incomplete pass later and it was 4th & 11 at the Swordfish 23 yard

line and decision time for **Guy Williams**. It was a gamble either way: Aguayo had been shaky all afternoon; while going for it again might have been pressing his luck too far. He decided to go with his kicker.

It turned out to be the right decision. The fiercely competitive Aguayo had overcome his case of the yips by sheer force of will. He drilled the kick down the center for a 41-yard field goal to tie the game 24-24 with 3:41 remaining.

I was overcome with the feeling, fueled by my second pint of *DIPA* (the 10.5% IPA), that the game would be decided on the upcoming Sebastian possession. I had no confidence that the Swordfish could stop the Triumph offence and had no expectation that the Triumph offence was about to stop itself if they got the ball back with time remaining. It was going to come down to ***Jameis Winston*** and whether or not he could make a play to put his team in the history books. I had my doubts that he would be able to do this. But Aguayo had overcome his demons when the chips were down for his team. Maybe Winston would do the same.

Ymj%X tw ikxmx%wjxuts xj%yt%Flzf t x%lfr j-tying field goal was less than stellar. It bordered on disaster. Winston was blindsided by ***Jurrell Casey*** on the first play from scrimmage and was lucky to have held on to the ball. Then the Swordfish line picked the wrong time to suddenly miss a block, allowing Anderson to be dumped in the backfield by Casey again. On 3rd & 12 Winston missed a check down to ***Brandon Coleman*** and it was punting time. ***Jordan Berry*** kicked it high, but not very far. Brown was contained to a 1-yard return but the Fish had netted just 34 yards, giving the Triumph great field position at their 48.

The only thing the Triumph did wrong on their ensuing series was score too early. With Sebastian out of timeouts and 1:19 wjr fns nsl%s%ymj%fr jl%Gwt s%o fi j%ymj%r nxyfpj %lkyfpnsl%f%xmt wy%zy%ufxx%7; %fwi xyt%ymj%mtzxj%t wymj%t -ahead score. The bar erupted in a frenzy of roaring, screeching and cursing. The accountants jumped up and down, chanting TRI-*UMPH*! TRI-*UMPH*! TRI-*UMPH*!". Aileen and Ben slumped in their seats. Aileen had taken off her Swordfish bill after the Casey sack so that she could shake her head without knocking over her drink. Xmj%zws ji %[redacted]jw%dr jnx%t jxs y%f j%%ti f l %xmj%fri 3

There was time left for a Swordfish miracle. But, like Aileen, I too felt that it would have literally taken a miracle for them to tie the game. A few diehard Swordfish fans refused to read the digital tea leaves and began to whoop it up as the camera focused on Winston walking onto the field and into the huddle. He looked unfit to lead in that moment. The end was an ugly one. ***Jerry Hughes*** sacked Winston for an 11-yard loss on 3rd & 4, bringing up a do-or-die 4th & 15 with 0:29 left. On what turned out to be the final play of the game, Winston threw long to Beckham. The throw was too far in front and Beckham had to dive to catch it. He did but was touched down almost immediately. The Swordfish scrambled to spike the ball but time ran out. The game was over. The Triumph had triumphed, as I knew they would...but it had been close.

THE LAST WORD

Gfqj%Xf jwx% %qn ji%zu%yt%ymj%mujqjfi nsl%zu%yt%ymj%qjflzj x%mxytwc 10th championship game. It was a closely contested match with enough highlight reel plays to qualify it as one of the more exciting final games we have witnessed. But I could not shake the disquieting sense that in the end the game had arrived at the right result in the wrong way.

While I had been confident of a Triumph victory beforehand, the game itself had seriously shaken that confidence, even as **Guy Williams** %squad finished off a perfect season in classic 2016 Triumph style: with a thrilling touchdown pass to ***Antonio Brown***. The Triumph star finished off an MVP Season in MVP form, deservedly winning Player of the Game to join a select group of 10 players fore[&)7( )-1406Tm/G804C]TJET(p)-5(lay)17( )-2(b)-5(u)6(t th)54(s)350-5(0)-5(.)-2(an159(to)-(s)3(t))-5(r)-3(e1)

[illegible] what Randy felt we could have gotten for our tickets on the scalpers market. In my drunken celebratory mood I shared my jackpot with my friends by [illegible] nothing morally wrong by giving away our tickets to Rob and his family; to the extent that my friends did, we were now even.

Poor **Charlie Wood** was inconsolable after the game. He wouldn t reveal what he had lost betting at the last minute on Swordfish, but it had clearly been a substantial sum. **Randy the Desert Rat**, in an irretrievably bad mood still from not raking in a fortune for his ticket, directed his anger at the officials. He felt that they had missed calling roughing the passer on Ansah for the hit on Dalton. He complained bitterly that the league should take a look at Ansah s hit on Dalton and fine the bastard $10,000! he had said.

I got a flurry of texts from other beat reporters who had been at the stadium and had been looking for me.

'where are you? Guy in a Dragons jersey in your seat," wrote **Jean Boisvert**, who once covered the Dragons for the *Swampland Proof*. Another text came in from Jean 30 minutes later: 'can't believe it! I know the Dragons guy old season ticket holder. Great guy but real sick. Good call spats!'

I almost showed the text to Randy but decided not to. I felt good after reading it and wanted to hold on to the feeling.

I booked out of my hotel room at the Knights Inn just as the Canton Police Drug Squad was executing a raid down the hall at the opposite end from my room. The clerk at the front desk carried on with my checkout as if nothing was going on.

I held on to my return ticket to New York on *Gusair* Flight 2 as a souvenir and bought, at my own expense, a much more expensive one from *WestJet* just to make sure I got home alive. I met Gabby at the airport and we had breakfast before her flight back to LA. One thing about Gabby, she valued appearances and she did not want everyone else to know we were fighting. Breakfast was her idea but she let me know in no uncertain terms that she had not forgiven me yet for standing her up three times in Canton and hanging [illegible] Gabby.

The election debate between the journalists never really ended, it had been just suspended for the length of the big game. I suppose it will never end; the divide appears to be just too great. Hopefully, for the sake of the nation, Democrats and Republicans can find some common ground to build on over the coming years and restore some health to our democracy.

As I sat at the gate waiting for my flight, I got a news flash on my Blackberry. **Chris Ferraro** had just announced the sale of the Mission Viejo Monarchs to a Seattle coffee consortium ' details to follow. So my old nemesis was leaving! Even though he had spent most of his time as an owner trying to have me locked up and assassinated, we had finally made our peace last year. I was surprised to find that I was a little choked up at the news. Life can be very strange.

Well, that wraps it up for this year. The Twin Cities Triumph are officially EFL Champions as well as the second team to post a perfect season. The 10th EFL season, the league s biggest, is now part of history. I am now banking on the EFL s blood ritual to Marduk to keep the league going, and thus keeping me employed, for another 10 years.

Good night folks! See you in the Fall of 2017!

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JIMMY'S SEASON WRAP UP

TWIN CITIES @ SEBASTIAN (line – TRIUMPH by 1)

INJURIES: Twin Cities ' None; **Sebastian** ' None.

MY PICK: Sebastian

Okay, so I got the final game wrong! But give me a break; Andy Dalton was injured in the 1st quarter. I tell you it would have been a different game if he had stayed healthy. Unlike the Triumph, I wasn't perfect this year. I wasn't even on my usual pace. But with the league expanding and greater parity making nothing a sure bet, you could have done worse than follow my advice. In fact, if you went with another bookie I know you did. At 58% winning percentage I am still the best there is!

