

2016

10

Est. 2007



WILDCARD

Celebrating our 10th year of football excellence

February 12, 2017

2016

10

Est. 2007



WEEKEND

EAST



COWTOWN

10



GWINNETT

30



ST. CHARLES

23



LOS ANGELES

24

NORTH



ATLANTIC



SOUTH



Frank Gore

GORED!

LA Knights RB **Frank Gore** hurdles over Charger lineman **Quinton Dial** on his way into the end zone for the eventual game-winning TD in Wildcard Weekend action at Round Table Stadium. The Knights finished off a remarkable 4th quarter comeback to survive a stiff challenge from the Chargers. In other wildcard action, Gwinnett WR, **Jeremy Maclin** caught 2 TD passes and **LeSean McCoy** rushed for 135 yards and 2 TDs as the Gladiators handled the Corn Kings, 30-10 in Gwinnett Coliseum. (Story and Stats inside) Also inside is Spats McChad's Post-Season Post-Mortem and Jimmy the Geek's game analysis and predictions for the Quarter Finals.



Who was slick
in Weekend
Wildcard?

"BRYLCREEM" THE
EFL'S FIRST SPONSOR



Jeremy Maclin
WR
Gwinnett
Gladiators

7 Rec, 158 yds, 2 TDs. 77-yard TD catch in 4th put the game away.



Vernon Hargreaves
CB
LA Knights

5 T, 1 PD, 1 INT (40 yds). His pick-six in 4th tied the game.



23

St. Charles



24

Los Angeles

TEAM LEADERS

Passing	Cmp	Att	Yds	TD
McCown	12	27	230	0
Rushing	Car	Yds	Avg	TD
Charles	9	65	7.2	2
Receiving	Rec	Yds	Avg	TD
Benjamin	3	119	39.7	1

Team	1	2	3	4	OT	Total
St. Charles	0	14	3	6	-	23
Los Angeles	3	0	0	21	-	24

Play of the Game

In the 4th quarter, trailing 17-10 with just 7:00 left to play and the Knights' offence struggling, **Vernon Hargreaves** intercepted **Josh McCown** and returned it 40 yards for a TD to tie the game.

TEAM LEADERS

Passing	Cmp	Att	Yds	TD
Bridgewater	21	41	229	0
Rushing	Car	Yds	Avg	TD
Gore	22	97	4.4	2
Receiving	Rec	Yds	Avg	TD
Matthews	9	114	12.7	0

GORED IN THE GUT!

BACK-TO-BACK PICKS SPARK KNIGHTS' CRAZY 4TH QUARTER COMEBACK!

SUMMARY: The Champs of 2011 had gone 9-39 since their first round playoff elimination in 2012, including a winless campaign in 2014. For the Knights of LA, returning to the post-season was a victory in itself. The expansion Chargers were of course making their first post-season appearance as a franchise. Their season was already a success. A win in the wildcard would be gravy. Neither offence gained much traction in the opening period until a 38-yard pass to **Jordan Matthews** set up the ice-breaker: a 21-yard FG by **Greg Zuerlein** to give the Knights a 3-0 lead. That effort would be the best the stilted Knights offence could offer over the first three quarters. While LA's passing attack bogged down, veteran **Josh McCown** – getting the start over rookie **Carson Wentz** – hit on big gainers of 76 yards to **Travis Benjamin** and 35 yards to **Vincent Jackson** to set up 5 and 9-yard TD runs by veteran **Jamaal Charles** to give the St. Charles a 14-3 half time lead. Consternation in the Knights' camp increased when an opening series three-and-out was followed by a 40-yard check down to **Darren Sproles** and a **Steven Hauschka** 41-yard FG to increase the Charger's lead to 17-3. The ineffectiveness of **Teddy Bridgewater** prompted the surprise insertion into the game of back-up **Ryan Nassib** near the end of the 3rd quarter. He presided over a series that went nowhere prompting Bridgewater's return and another three-and-out. The situation looked grim for the Knights until the 9:37 mark of the 4th, when CB **David Amerson** picked off McCown and returned it 37 yards to the 5 to set up a **Frank Gore** TD run. Their lead reduced to 7 points, the Chargers were not about to back down. McCown went deep to **Terrance Williams** on a 3rd & 15 but instead found rookie CB **Vernon Hargreaves**, who returned it the distance for a 40-yard pick-six. Suddenly, the game was tied. Wentz was called in to save the day for St. Charles. He did his part with a perfect 31-yard cross to Benjamin for a TD. But Hauschka missed the extra point, holding the Charger lead to 6 points with 3:52 remaining. It would come back to haunt them. Looking for redemption, Bridgewater went 6 for 6 for 58 yards on the ensuing series to reach the red zone. From there Gore finished off the game-winning drive with runs of 13 and 6 yards, cutting over right tackle for the winning score.

QUOTES: "Teddy was not getting any breaks and it was getting to him. So I put Ryan in there for a series to change the pace. You saw how Teddy was a different QB on that last series. Of course the two picks were big. It was a great team effort all around!" – LA coach, **Jeff Dorhn**.
 "We really didn't belong here to begin with. But I am proud of our effort. I thought Josh gave us a steady hand early in the game. Those two interceptions were attempts to make plays, but their corners made bigger plays. It happens. They have a great D." – St. Charles coach, **Jeff Clingan**.



ANGRY FAN



titter

HAPPY FAN



Bolt Boy @boltboy22

We will be back and Carson will lead the way. GO BOLTS!



GabbyV @ladailynews

Simply splendid to host a playoff party at The Round again!



St. Charles 23 Los Angeles 24



	1	2	3	4	F
St. Charles	0	14	3	6	23
Los Angeles	3	0	0	21	24

* Playoff * 02-10-2017 Round Table Stadium Temp:45 Wind:Calm None No Line MVP:Gore

1	1:21	Los Angeles	FG	Zuerlein 21 (11-84-6:52)	0-3
2	8:06	St. Charles	TD	Charles 5 run (Hauschka) (4-70-2:48)	7-3
2	1:52	St. Charles	TD	Charles 9 run (Hauschka) (10-86-4:46)	14-3
3	11:03	St. Charles	FG	Hauschka 41 (7-46-3:32)	17-3
4	8:49	Los Angeles	TD	Gore 2 run (Zuerlein) (2-5-0:48)	17-10
4	7:07	Los Angeles	TD	Hargreaves 40 interception return (Zuerlein)	17-17
4	3:52	St. Charles	TD	Wentz 31 pass to Benjamin (no good) (5-80-3:15)	23-17
4	0:24	Los Angeles	TD	Gore 6 run (Zuerlein) (9-80-3:28)	23-24

Player Stats

Passing	Att	Cmp	Yds	25	In	Td	Sk	Rate
McCown	27	12	230	3	2	0	2	43.8
Wentz	4	3	50	1	0	1	0	156.3
	31	15	280	4	2	1	2	63.9

Rushing	Att	Yds	Avg	FD	10	Lg	Td
Charles	9	65	7.2	4	1	14	2
Sproules	10	63	6.3	2	2	27	0
Allen	7	17	2.4	1	0	8	0
McCown	1	8	8.0	0	0	8	0
	27	153	5.7	7	3	27	2

Receiving	No	Dp	Att	Yds	Avg	FD	25	Lg	Td
Sproules	4	0	7	58	14.5	1	1	40	0
Benjamin	3	0	4	119	39.7	3	2	76	1
Jackson	2	0	3	46	23.0	2	1	35	0
Graham	2	0	6	23	11.5	1	0	15	0
Williams,T	2	0	5	29	14.5	2	0	17	0
Charles	1	0	1	3	3.0	0	0	3	0
Allen	1	0	2	2	2.0	0	0	2	0
Thomas,M	0	0	2	0	0.0	0	0	0	0
Line	0	0	1	0	0.0	0	0	0	0
	15	0	31	280	18.7	9	4	76	1

Fumbles	No	Rec	Td
McCown	1	1	0
Sproules	1	0	0
Leno Jr.	0	1	0
	2	2	0

Kick Returns	No	Yds	Avg	Lg	Td
Archer	2	61	30.5	31	0
	2	61	30.5	31	0

Punt Returns	No	Fc	Yds	Avg	Lg	Td
Benjamin	4	2	7	1.8	5	0
	4	2	7	1.8	5	0

Kicking	FG	Lg	XP	Pts
Hauschka	1-1	41	2-3	5

Punting	No	Yds	Avg	Tb	20	Bk	Lg
Lechler	6	265	44.2	1	4	0	51

Defense	Tkl	Sk	Def	Stf	Hur	FF	Int
Durant	9	0	0	0	0	1	0-0
Smith	8	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Acker	6	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Washington	5	0	1	1	0	0	0-0
Jenkins	4	1	0	0	1	1	0-0
Minter	3	0	1	1	0	0	0-0
Hall	3	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Nelson	2	0	3	0	0	0	0-0
Thompson	2	0	1	0	0	0	0-0
Butler	2	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Williams,M	1	0	0	0	5	0	0-0
Carrie	1	0	1	0	0	0	0-0
McCullers	1	0	0	0	1	0	0-0
Spence	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Dial	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Thomas,C	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Claiborne	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Ngakoue	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
	52	1	7	2	7	2	0-0

Passing	Att	Cmp	Yds	25	In	Td	Sk	Rate
Bridgewater	41	21	229	1	0	0	1	68.0
Nassib,R	3	1	4	0	0	0	0	42.4
	44	22	233	1	0	0	1	65.8

Rushing	Att	Yds	Avg	FD	10	Lg	Td
Gore	22	97	4.4	8	3	13	2
Perkins	1	5	5.0	0	0	5	0
Bridgewater	2	3	1.5	1	0	2	0
	25	105	4.2	9	3	13	2

Receiving	No	Dp	Att	Yds	Avg	FD	25	Lg	Td
Matthews	9	2	18	114	12.7	4	1	38	0
Cooks	6	1	14	63	10.5	2	0	18	0
Gore	3	0	4	19	6.3	1	0	10	0
Barnidge	2	1	4	29	14.5	2	0	17	0
Burton	2	0	4	8	4.0	0	0	4	0
	22	4	44	233	10.6	9	1	38	0

Fumbles	No	Rec	Td
Gore	1	1	0
Bridgewater	1	0	0
Garnett	0	1	0
	2	2	0

Kick Returns	No	Yds	Avg	Lg	Td
	0	0	0.0	0	0

Punt Returns	No	Fc	Yds	Avg	Lg	Td
Cooks	1	2	3	3.0	3	0
	1	2	3	3.0	3	0

Kicking	FG	Lg	XP	Pts
Zuerlein	1-1	21	3-3	6

Punting	No	Yds	Avg	Tb	20	Bk	Lg
Martin	7	333	47.6	0	2	0	50

Defense	Tkl	Sk	Def	Stf	Hur	FF	Int
Lee	10	0	1	2	0	0	0-0
Hargreaves	5	0	1	0	0	0	1-40
Amerson	4	0	0	0	0	0	1-37
Orakpo	4	0	0	0	2	0	0-0
Baker	4	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Sheard	3	1	0	0	0	1	0-0
Woodson	3	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Peppers	3	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Bucannon	2	0	1	0	0	0	0-0
Williams	2	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
McGill	2	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Bennett	1	1	0	0	1	0	0-0
Short	1	0	1	0	3	1	0-0
Wilcox	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Richburg	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Amos	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Vaccaro	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Edwards Jr.	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Murray	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
	50	2	4	2	6	2	2-77



In a big team win he scored 2 TDs in traffic and finished off the comeback.

	St. Charles	Los Angeles
First Downs	18	19
Rushes	27-153	25-105
Passes	31-15-280	44-22-233
Sacked	2-21	1-13
Fumble	2	2
Penalties	8-62	6-50
Turnovers	2	0
Missed Tackles	8	11
Dropped Passes	0	4
Bad Passes	3	0
Passes 25+	4	1
Runs 10+	3	3
Blitzes	28	32
Time	32:10	27:50
Third Down	6-14	5-15
Fourth Down	0-0	1-2
Red Att/Td/Fg	2/2/0	3/2/1
Net Offense	412	325



10

Cowtown



30

Gwinnett

TEAM LEADERS				
Passing	Cmp	Att	Yds	TD
Flacco	29	56	294	1
Rushing	Car	Yds	Avg	TD
Gurley	13	86	6.6	0
Receiving	Rec	Yds	Avg	TD
Evans	7	105	15.0	0

Team	1	2	3	4	OT	Total
Cowtown	0	3	0	7	-	10
Gwinnett	6	7	7	10	-	30

Play of the Game

Early in the 3rd quarter, with the Glads leading 13-3 but the Corn Kings threatening, **Vic Beasley Jr** strip-sacked **Joe Flacco** to turn around possession and set up the Glads' third TD.

TEAM LEADERS				
Passing	Cmp	Att	Yds	TD
Big Ben	14	23	236	2
Rushing	Car	Yds	Avg	TD
McCoy	17	135	7.9	2
Receiving	Rec	Yds	Avg	TD
Maclin	7	158	22.6	2

GLADIATORS MOW DOWN CORN KINGS!

McCOY & MACLIN COMBINE FOR 4 TDs IN EASY WIN

SUMMARY: On a chilly but calm day in Gwinnett, two original franchises squared off for the right to enter the quarter final round. Both franchises had been to the post-season five times before, but neither could boast much playoff success. The Corn Kings had not won a playoff game since 2007; the Glads had made it to the final in 2011, but had been blanked in their other playoff appearances. The Corn Kings were the visitors because they had had dropped a close contest to the Glads in Week 14. The Glads were favoured because of it, but an upset was well within reach. From the very first drive it was clear that the visitors would have to fight an uphill battle. The Glads took the opening drive 93 yards in 16 plays, eating up half the 1st quarter in the process, and finishing with a 1-yard TD run by **LeSean McCoy**. A missed extra point took some of the gleam off, but the precision of the Glads' attack was encouraging. The Corn Kings started to answer, moving the ball quickly into Glads' territory on the edge of FG range. But a holding penalty and a sack by **Vic Beasley Jr** forced a punt and set the pattern for the game. The Corn Kings moved the ball fairly well, but invariably stalled when they got close. Meanwhile, **Ben Roethlisberger** enjoyed a day without significant pressure from the Corn Kings' pass rush. This was due to the ever dangerous McCoy keeping linebackers honest and the stalwart protection of a seemingly impenetrable offensive line. A 21-yard TD pass to **Jeremy Maclin** made it 13-0 Glads before the Corn Kings finally got on the board with a 27-yard FG by **Nick Novak** before half time. Cowtown opened the 2nd half with the ball. They nickel-and-dimed their way into Gwinnett territory and looked to have momentum after converting a 4th & 3 at the Gwinnett 42. But on the next play, Beasley strip-sacked **Joe Flacco** and the Glads recovered. They took advantage by force-marching 64 yards on the running of McCoy and a 24-yard pass to Maclin, and made it 20-3 on an 8-yard delayed draw to McCoy. A desperation 4th & 7 gamble by Cowtown at their 47 set up a Gwinnett FG to make it 23-3 early in the 4th. Gwinnett put the game away on their next possession. Big Ben hit Maclin on a long fly for a 77-yard TD. The Corn Kings finally found the end zone in garbage time but that it was not enough to threaten the Glads on this day.

QUOTES: "That nice drive they had to start the game really set the tone for them. We were off balance on defence and unable to execute at crucial moments on offence. Little things piled up against us. They didn't make mistakes and we did." – Cowtown coach, **Jim Coghlin**.

"Everything we needed to go right, did today. With Jarvis out there was a lot of pressure on McCoy and Maclin to play their best football. They did. We rode M&M train to victory with Big Ben as the conductor." – Gwinnett coach, **Dave Birdsall**.



ANGRY FAN



titter

HAPPY FAN



Orville Smucker @Smuckerscoop

,,,,,glfjee;;
rhgjre2e,,,
,,,,,,,,,



Marcus Aurelius @MAXIV

Two Thousand (MM) put on a glorious show for the Plebs of Gwinnett!



Cowtown 10 Gwinnett 30



	1	2	3	4	F
Cowtown	0	3	0	7	10
Gwinnett	6	7	7	10	30

* Playoff * 02-10-2017 Gwinnett Coliseum Temp:41 Wind:0-5 None No Line MVP:Maclin

1	6:30	Gwinnett	TD	McCoy 1 run (no good) (16-93-8:25)	0-6
2	2:55	Gwinnett	TD	Roethlisberger 21 pass to Maclin (Santos) (11-96-4:55)	0-13
2	0:16	Cowtown	FG	Novak 27 (13-84-2:28)	3-13
3	4:28	Gwinnett	TD	McCoy 8 run (Santos) (6-59-3:50)	3-20
4	14:06	Gwinnett	FG	Santos 41 (6-24-2:28)	3-23
4	12:44	Gwinnett	TD	Roethlisberger 77 pass to Maclin (Santos) (1-77-0:18)	3-30
4	7:28	Cowtown	TD	Flacco 6 pass to Myers (Novak) (15-80-5:16)	10-30

Player Stats

Passing	Att	Cmp	Yds	25	In	Td	Sk	Rate
Flacco	56	29	294	1	0	1	2	73.1
Garoppolo	3	1	18	0	0	0	0	54.9
	59	30	312	1	0	1	2	72.1

Rushing	Att	Yds	Avg	FD	10	Lg	Td
Gurley	13	86	6.6	5	4	24	0
Blount	10	44	4.4	3	1	12	0
Asiata	1	4	4.0	0	0	4	0
Flacco	2	2	1.0	2	0	1	0
Garoppolo	1	2	2.0	0	0	2	0
	27	138	5.1	10	5	24	0

Receiving	No	Dp	Att	Yds	Avg	FD	25	Lg	Td
Evans	7	1	13	105	15.0	7	1	26	0
Fitzgerald	7	0	13	51	7.3	1	0	11	0
Smith Sr.	6	1	14	73	12.2	5	0	17	0
Thomas	3	0	7	25	8.3	2	0	11	0
Myers	2	0	3	13	6.5	2	0	7	1
Asiata	2	1	3	11	5.5	0	0	8	0
Hogan	1	0	2	10	10.0	0	0	10	0
Ross	1	0	1	18	18.0	1	0	18	0
Gurley	1	0	2	6	6.0	1	0	6	0
Flacco	0	0	1	0	0.0	0	0	0	0
	30	3	59	312	10.4	19	1	26	1

Fumbles	No	Rec	Td
Flacco	1	0	0
Evans	1	0	0
Havenstein	0	1	0
	2	1	0

Kick Returns	No	Yds	Avg	Lg	Td
Ross	2	38	19.0	20	0
Whitehead	1	11	11.0	11	0
	3	49	16.3	20	0

Punt Returns	No	Fc	Yds	Avg	Lg	Td
Kerley	1	0	-1	-1.0	0	0
	1	0	-1	-1.0	0	0

Kicking	FG	Lg	XP	Pts
Novak	1-1	27	1-1	4

Punting	No	Yds	Avg	Tb	20	Bk	Lg
Hekker	3	148	49.3	1	1	0	51

Defense	Tkl	Sk	Def	Str	Hur	FF	Int
Harris	8	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Darby	7	0	2	0	0	0	0-0
Dareus	6	0	0	1	0	0	0-0
Misi	5	0	0	1	0	0	0-0
Kerrigan	4	0	0	1	0	0	0-0
McLeod	4	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Hardy	3	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Newman	2	0	1	0	0	0	0-0
Johnson	2	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Webster	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Quin	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Burley	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Long	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
	45	0	3	3	0	0	0-0

Passing	Att	Cmp	Yds	25	In	Td	Sk	Rate
Roethlisberger	23	14	236	1	0	2	0	124.5
	23	14	236	1	0	2	0	124.5

Rushing	Att	Yds	Avg	FD	10	Lg	Td
McCoy	17	135	7.9	8	5	23	2
Polk	9	29	3.2	1	0	7	0
Barner	3	5	1.7	0	0	7	0
Roethlisberger	1	-1	-1.0	0	0	0	0
	30	168	5.6	9	5	23	2

Receiving	No	Dp	Att	Yds	Avg	FD	25	Lg	Td
Maclin	7	0	8	158	22.6	5	1	77	2
Stills	2	0	5	28	14.0	2	0	16	0
Polk	2	0	3	20	10.0	1	0	10	0
Chandler	1	0	2	6	6.0	0	0	6	0
Daniels,O	1	1	2	9	9.0	1	0	9	0
Mitchell	1	0	1	15	15.0	1	0	15	0
McCoy	0	0	2	0	0.0	0	0	0	0
	14	1	23	236	16.9	10	1	77	2

Fumbles	No	Rec	Td
Greenway	0	1	0
	0	1	0

Kick Returns	No	Yds	Avg	Lg	Td
Ellington	1	11	11.0	11	0
Kouandjio	1	7	7.0	7	0
Barner	1	0	0.0	0	0
	3	18	6.0	11	0

Punt Returns	No	Fc	Yds	Avg	Lg	Td
Ellington	1	1	2	2.0	2	0
	1	1	2	2.0	2	0

Kicking	FG	Lg	XP	Pts
Santos	1-1	41	3-4	6

Punting	No	Yds	Avg	Tb	20	Bk	Lg
Lee,A	3	127	42.3	0	2	0	57

Defense	Tkl	Sk	Def	Str	Hur	FF	Int
Pryor	8	0	1	0	0	0	0-0
Kendricks	7	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Burnett	6	0	1	0	0	1	0-0
Greenway	6	0	1	0	0	0	0-0
Butler	6	0	1	0	0	0	0-0
Beasley Jr.	5	2	1	0	0	1	0-0
Smith,J	5	0	2	0	0	0	0-0
Hayden	4	0	1	0	0	0	0-0
Jarrett	4	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Brown,M	3	0	2	1	0	0	0-0
Mauluga	3	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Daniels,M	2	0	1	1	0	0	0-0
Chickillo	2	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Bell	2	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Smith,S	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
McLendon	0	0	0	0	2	0	0-0
	64	2	11	2	2	2	0-0



JEREMY MACLIN
GWINNETT

Big Ben's main and only top rate target caught 2 TD passes.

	Cowtown	Gwinnett
First Downs	29	20
Rushes	27-138	30-168
Passes	59-30-312	23-14-236
Sacked	2-14	0-0
Fumble	2	0
Penalties	4-32	2-11
Turnovers	1	0
Missed Tackles	6	10
Dropped Passes	3	1
Bad Passes	3	0
Passes 25+	1	1
Runs 10+	5	5
Blitzes	12	16
Time	32:35	27:25
Third Down	10-19	5-10
Fourth Down	3-5	1-1
Red Att/Td/Fg	3/1/1	2/2/0
Net Offense	436	404



AROUND THE

10 EFL 10

With Spats McChad

NEW YORK – First: some thoughts on Card Weekend. I took the ‘Wild’ out because there was nothing particularly wild about either game, the stunning comeback by the Knights notwithstanding. I am going to argue with myself here because I am not of one mind about this unattractive, but possibly necessary, appendage to the traditional EFL playoff format.

On the plus side, the shunting of the wildcard teams aside to battle it out before the start of the quarter finals gives the three division winners a week of rest and creates a real advantage to winning a division. The added incentive to win the division increases the odds of better football games late in the regular season, in proportion to the larger stakes, and certainly adds more drama for fans. It also adds another week to the football junkie’s calendar and another week of advertising revenue for all concerned on the business side of the sport.

On the negative side, introducing the playoffs with four teams that are unlikely to continue the journey to the final game carries entertainment and commitment risks. Like when Starsailor opens for the Rolling Stones – you don’t know how they will go over and who will bother to listen. Of course fans of the teams involved will tune in; but do the ‘nouveau riche’ Sebastian fans really care whether they face Cowtown or Gwinnett in the first round? All they see are two lambs baaaaing and bleating it out to see which one will be slaughtered inhumanely at the Fish Tank. And do neutral fans really care to watch **Big Ben** carve up the Corn King secondary as their defensive line is pushed back by **Joe Thomas**? – judging from the unimpressive ratings for game one in Gwinnett; not particularly. Then there is the question of the prize for winning the division. Is it actually too lucrative? Is Brooklin, a team that came within an inch of being knocked out of the playoffs totally by expansion St. Charles, more deserving of a week’s rest than the Knights, a team that was in a position to win a much tougher division?

Nothing is perfect; and team competitive sports leagues in general are highly imperfect in creating strict fairness in scheduling so as to create equal conditions for every team. It *ain’t never* going to happen that all teams will be tested equally all the time and that the winner at the end of the day is beyond dispute truly the *best* team. But we accept a certain level of unfairness and credit the eventual winner with the honour of Champion – even if that means choking back a bit of vomit.

There is no doing away with the wildcards – good teams in very good divisions need a path to the post-season. There is no doing away with divisions – teams should be grouped together to support local rivalries and facilitate travel. But that unfair reality means that in any given year, a post-season format that includes a preliminary week of culling, like Wildcard Weekend, is going to look ugly sometimes, unfair others, and....just maybe...it will someday produce a classic.

THE DECISION

Chargers’ coach **Mike Martz** was faced with a dilemma: whether to start a veteran at quarterback; or go with the exciting young rookie – the future if not the current face of the franchise – in his team’s first ever playoff game. It was a decision for which he would not get much credit if it worked, but for which he would get all of the blame if it failed.

Fans in St. Charles were divided almost evenly, judging from the local straw polls. The results varied depending on how the choices were presented. For example, when *Charger Talk* ran its poll, 57% chose **Josh McCown**, “the cool veteran who won’t freak out,” versus 43% for **Carson Wentz**, “the raw rookie, boom or bust.” But when *The Marylander* polled its readers, 58% chose **Carson Wentz**, “the kid with the magic touch,” versus 42% for **Josh McCown**, “the safer option.”

We know that fan opinion often blows in the direction of the hot air coming out of the so-called “expert’s” mouths, but those experts were also divided. **Peter Prince** of *North America Today*, the mainstreamer’s mainstreamer, declared in favour of McCown because of his experience. The fact that all of that valued experience had come in the NFL over 10 years ago and that since that time he had been a journeyman traveling between three rival leagues (save for a back-up stint and 0 snaps in Kutztown in 2007) before landing in the EFL on the Chargers, was never a big part of the discussion. On the other hand, the blustering **Russ Flont** of ESPN, who had long ago jumped on the Wentz bandwagon and refused to get off, despite Wentz’s struggles in the final two weeks of the season, declared: “*Carson Wentz is a winner and he is going to the Hall of Fame someday.*” As he blabbered, his cheeks turned crimson, his second chin jiggled and his eyes bulged. “*You have to start the face of your franchise in such a historic moment for your franchise!*”

In passer rating they were practically tied, with Wentz’s 85.9 edging out McCown’s 85.4. But Wentz supporters felt they held the trump card due to their protégé’s winning percentage: the team was 6-4 in Wentz’s starts but just 2-4 when McCown started. McCown backers pointed out that two of those losses came against Sebastian and Twin Cities; but Wentz

boosters countered with the fact that McCown's other two losses had come against Scarborough and Carthage. Ouch!

No doubt it was a tough call. And Martz kept everybody in suspense by running both quarterbacks evenly with the first team offence in practice and not announcing the starter until the Saturday night before the game. In the end, he went with the safer option. The one that might appeal to a more mature audience, like his boss, **John Clingan**; who had already gone on record in the media more than once with his opinion that his team was likely to lose the game regardless of who started at quarterback, but that he still expected a "good game" from his boys in blue.

Clearly that was a public signal to Martz that read: *don't embarrass me*. And so the coach's survival instinct overruled



A father-son team at the Coliseum in Gwinnett relax and enjoy watching their heroes, **Big Ben** and **LeSean McCoy**, casually dismantle the Cowtown defence.

any gut instinct he may have had that sensed the younger Wentz had more of what it takes to actually win the game, rather than merely guarantee it would be close. Coaches don't usually get fired after one season for taking the more prudent option. And so the die was cast – **Josh McCown** would determine the Charger's fate.

THE REDEMPTION OF SIR TEDDY

There was no similar dilemma in Los Angeles. The Knights were locked in to **Teddy Bridgewater** as the starter one way or the other. That was making a few of the more namby-pamby Knights' fans and jittery LA media-types nervous and perhaps silently wishing that they had a McCown-type veteran to turn to. The fact that the Knights would probably be sitting closer to Mission Viejo in the standings if not for Bridgewater was not especially valued by these fair-weather fans. They were interested in what he would do for them *now*, and recent weeks had shown them that young **Sir Teddy** was flawed. He had been exceptionally flawed in a 10-7 loss the previous week in the season finale at St. Charles. The offence had been shutout and Bridgewater had thrown for 52 yards and an interception.

Bridgewater's very human performance over the last four weeks of the season prompted a vocal minority to feel that the worst predictions of the cynics and naysayers, who had claimed Bridgewater was a flash in the pan, were actually coming true. This was permeating the fan base, creating something close to panic among the Knights' faithful, who feared that their venerable original EFL franchise, a former Champion, would experience the dishonour of losing a playoff game to an *expansion team* in the league's celebrated and likely to be much chronicled 10th season.

The only "sports" writer voicing unqualified support for Bridgewater was **Gabrielle Laurent-Vainluven** of the *LA Daily News*, who wrote: "Teddy has been an absolute doll all season and I know he will play his heart out tomorrow. We had lunch at *Ink* in West Hollywood yesterday and he is looking handsome as always. He will be wearing a lucky blue 'Fool'* cravat I gave him for this memorable occasion." (*Yes, Gabby is shamelessly promoting her 'Fool' clothing line, which is doing quite well)

Despite the underlying fear, or perhaps because of it, a sold out Round Table Stadium was charged with an unusually high level of excitement on game day. It reminded **Quince Patterbum** of *LA Sports & Fitness Magazine* of the glory years:

"Not since that most gilded day of the Golden Age of Knights' football, when our boys in blue took down the powerful Undertakers here in this building to advance to the Championship in 2011, have I felt such energy; such optimism; such hope," he wrote awkwardly over three tweets of his Titter feed.

However, the crowd's nervous pre-game energy struggled to sustain itself through a fairly pedestrian first quarter. The LA defence had forced three punts in three Charger possessions, but the fans craved a turnover. The offence had looked better than it had last week but had just a field goal to show from a trip to the Charger 3 yard line. A 3-0 lead after 15 minutes was not exactly the bold opening rush they had hoped for.

The Chargers appeared to be probing the Knights' defence. They tested a variety of plays with little success, but remained turnover-free against the league's top takeaway team. McCown was doing his job as expected, but at some point he would have to make a play or his team would be slowly suffocated to death by the 'Blue Shield.' That moment came unexpectedly on a 3rd & 21, after a sack and a holding penalty had pushed the Chargers back inside their own red zone. McCown threw deep down the sideline to **Travis Benjamin**, who had worked his way behind corner **Vernon Hargreaves**. He snared the ball, managing to stay inbounds,

and tiptoed along the sideline until corner **David Amerson** caught up with him at the Knights' 5 yard line, saving a touchdown for the moment. But on the next play **Jamaal Charles** scooted around left tackle for the game's first major score. Suddenly it was 7-3 for the Chargers and the atmosphere in LA clouded over almost immediately.

The now exuberant and carefree Chargers fed off the gloom of the home crowd and their own excitement. They really had nothing to lose and everything to gain. The momentum carried over into a second TD six minutes later, when Charles knifed through the middle of the Knights' line and sprung into the end zone from 9 yards out to make it 14-3, St. Charles. The score had been set up by another big pass from McCown, this time a 35-yard cross to **Vincent Jackson**.

On the other side, **Sir Teddy** couldn't make a play that mattered. His offence scratched out a few first downs but no sustained movement. A regroup in the locker at half time made no discernible difference. They went three-and-out on the opening series and watched from the sidelines as McCown hooked up with **Darren Sproles** for a 40 yard pass to set up a field goal. The Chargers now led 17-3. For over 17 minutes the score beamed mockingly, in Diamond Vision® LED, at the disgruntled crowd while the game devolved into a punting duel. Finally, it happened: small groups of rowdies clustered in the upper deck and end zone seats began to boo Bridgewater. Nobody could remember the last time the notoriously tame LA crowd had gathered enough energy to boo their own quarterback. Even **Brodie Croyle** had never suffered an attack of boo birds.

And then...a *stranger* thing happened. LA coach **Jeff Dohrn**, an avowed non-smoker who, in his pressured state, had spontaneously lit up a cigarette (in contravention of stadium policy and State law), sent back-up QB, **Ryan Nassib** onto the field at the tail end of the 3rd quarter in place of Bridgewater. This move created turmoil in the stands and confusion in the broadcast booth.

"And Bridgewater will lead the offence onto the field hoping for a....hold on....it's...no...yes, back-up quarterback Ryan Nassib is coming onto the field!" exclaimed play-by-play man, **Ian Hawk**. *"And it doesn't look as if Bridgewater is injured. What do you make of this, Dan?"*

[pause] *"I'm not sure what to make of it, Ian,"* replied colour man **Dan Pouts**. *"I have to think Teddy must be injured. Nassib has played....let me see...30 snaps all season and attempted just 8 passes. To bring him in at this critical juncture, with the Knights' season on the line, just doesn't make any sense to me!"*

While a shaky Nassib guided the offence to 31 yards – 27 of those by **Frank Gore** – and a punt, Bridgewater warmed up furiously on the sideline. It was a vigorous warm-up, leaving no doubt that there was nothing physically wrong with him.

"It looks like Bridgewater is ready to come back in, Dan," **Ian Hawk** remarked as McCown threw incomplete to **Javorius Allen**, bringing up 4th & long and signalling an impending Charger punt.

"He certainly does look ready, Ian," replied **Dan Pouts**. *"And he looks pretty angry as well. Let's see what coach Dohrn does on this next possession."*

Indeed, Dohrn inserted Bridgewater back into the game. But the only thing that appeared to change was the velocity on his throws. Three hard fastballs missed their targets and the last, intended for **Jordan Matthews**, was nearly intercepted. The result was another three-and-out accompanied by even louder boos and chants of 'Na-ssib! Na-ssib!'

With little more than 10 minutes left, enough time remained in theory for the Knights to mount a comeback. But the way the offence was performing, it seemed like a longshot. The only saving grace was that the 'Blue Shield' had kept the Chargers' offence suppressed since the field goal early in the 3rd quarter. Without the big play, they could not move down the field. The veteran McCown saw this and hoped to drive in the knife by making one more big play. He dropped back and looked downfield, but the pass rush got through, with **Brian Orakpo** giving chase. Needing to get rid of the ball he tried to check down to **Jimmy Graham** but the pass was tipped by **Kawann Short** into the arms of Amerson, who carried it back 37 yards to the St. Charles 5 yard line. Two handoffs to Gore and the Knights were in the end zone for the first time, causing the fans to erupt in delight at the sudden turnaround.

"This is what the Knights have done all year long, Ian," explained Pouts. *"They lead the league in takeaways and they finally got one here at a critical period in the game!"*

With the crowd back in the game and having tasted blood for the first time all day, the Knights' defence turned it up another notch on the Chargers' next series. **Michael Bennett** blew apart an attempted screen by sacking McCown for an 11-yard loss to bring up 3rd & 15. Never one to play it safe too early in a game, Martz called a deep pass. But McCown felt pressure from a blitzing **Julius Peppers** and hurried his throw. Hargreaves jumped in front of **Terrance Williams** and picked it clean, his charging forward momentum putting him in the clear for a 40-yard interception return and a touchdown. **Greg Zuerlein** kicked the extra point to a delirious roar from the crowd. Suddenly, in the space of less than two minutes, the Knights had overturned 3½ quarters of frustration and had tied the game at 17.

During the commercial break, Martz looked over at McCown. The stunned veteran was staring vacantly at some photos from the booth of the Knights' defensive alignments. The coach did not dwell on his new dilemma for long; he made the switch to **Carson Wentz**. Hopefully it was not too late.

With 7:07 left, the Chargers got the ball back at their 20. Sproles immediately put the Knights' defence back on its heels with a burst over right guard for a 27-yard gain. Then, with the LA defence playing press man, Wentz hit Graham over the middle for a 15-yard completion. Two plays later, he hurled a dart to Benjamin, who was cutting across the middle with a head of steam. He hit him in stride and the speedy wide-out took off like a jet. No Knight was going to catch him and he crossed the goal line for a

31-yard touchdown catch. Wentz pumped his fist in the air. Round Table Stadium went silent. The Chargers had dramatically turned the tables after being on the ropes and there was no question that Wentz had been the key.

"That was a clutch throw!" exclaimed Pouts as Wentz bounced back to the Charger sideline. *"That was a winner's throw!"* he added for good measure.

The jubilation on the Charger sideline was soon checked, however, when **Steven Hauschka** missed the extra point. No longer a mere formality; the extra point, in situations like these, could be the difference between victory and defeat.

At their 20 yard line, with 3:52 left in the game and probably facing their last possession, it was now up to the Knights' offence to make its mark – something it had failed to do all afternoon. With the season now firmly on the line, a boisterous crowd rallied behind their man behind center – but there was a tone of distress in their chants of *'Ted-dy! Ted-dy!'* as if they were almost pleading for him to do something – anything – to justify their faith.

Perhaps it was the benching. Perhaps it was the crowd. Perhaps it was pressure of the moment finally squeezing out his inner-Montana. Or perhaps it was a complete fluke. Whatever it was, **Teddy Bridgewater** came through when it really, *finally* mattered. He hit on his first four passes before handing the ball off to Gore. In five plays, the Knights had covered 45 yards. After the two-minute warning, Bridgewater went to the air again, connecting on short tosses of 7 and 9 yards to Matthews to bring the ball to the Charger 28. With the Chargers now thinking pass all the way, Bridgewater handed it off to Gore, who gored through the second level of the Charger D for a 13-yard gain to the 6. With deliberation and no undue haste, Bridgewater calmly strode up to center with the clock ticking away...32...31...30...29..... as the Chargers closed ranks in their goal line package. Undeterred, the Knights hit them with the same play. Gore bounced around right tackle and leaped over a flattened **Quinton Dial**, charging virtually untouched into the end zone to tie the game at 23.

The crowd celebrated gleefully and loudly, but quieted suddenly as **Greg Zuerlein** took the field. The LA kicker was no sure thing these days. He was the league's least prolific field goal kicker, with just 7 field goals, and one of its least accurate. He had also missed 3 extra points. Perhaps it was heightening the drama of moments like these that had prompted the league to push the extra point back to the 15-yard line. If so, it worked on this day. This was no ordinary extra point. But with the crowd watching nervously, Zuerlein made the kick look very ordinary – booting it straight through the center for the go-ahead point with 0:24 left. The crowd and the Knights' sideline exploded jubilantly. Wentz threw deep and incomplete two plays later on the game's final snap, and the celebration became official. Sir Teddy could claim one part of a complete team victory for the Knights. He had finally redeemed himself.

BIG BEN'S WALK IN THE PARK

If the 4th quarter of the St. Charles-LA game alone was worth the price of admission to Wildcard Weekend, the entire Cowtown-Gwinnet game might have warranted at least a partial refund.

Raucous Glads fans at the Gwinnett County Coliseum were of course happy to spend the afternoon spoofing Ancient Rome and swigging cans of *'Golden GladiAle'* – the official beer of the Gladiators – while cheering their team on to a 30-10 victory. And diehard supporters of the Corn Kings were no doubt watching closely and vainly hoping that their defence would make a stop or **Joe Flacco** would finally make a play; all the way up until the moment **Big Ben** and **Jeremy Maclin** caught the Cowtown defence sleeping with a ball-crushing 77-yard TD pass to make it 30-3 for Gwinnett early in the 4th quarter. But for the rest of the football world the Cowtown-Gwinnett match was, at best, one of those games you have on in the background while you debate with your Wildcard Weekend party guests the prospects of the Chargers upsetting the Knights in the game *yet* to be played.

The game was what I call a "soft blowout" – a kind of slow boil cooking of the other team's goose. In this case, the Corn Kings never *truly* looked to be in the game, but it took most of the game to objectively demonstrate to them, their fans, and neutral observers not paying close attention, that they were in fact out of the game and had never been in it to begin with.

The opening drives for both teams describe the game in a nutshell. The Glads opened with a 16-play drive covering 93 yards that ended with **LeSean McCoy** ploughing through a 10-man box for a 1-yard TD run. At no point during this epic possession did it look like the Corn Kings were about to put a stop to the Glads' attack; and at no point did it look like the Glads were working overly hard to move the ball. The Corn Kings answered with what started as a promising drive and ended with a holding penalty and a third down sack by **Vic Beasley Jr** – his first of two on the day – to knock them out of field goal range. And that is basically how the game proceeded – with the Glads' offence stopping itself on those few occasions when it stopped and the Corn Kings making a show of moving the ball part of the distance, but not the rest of the distance to the end zone.

Apart from the score, the total stats do not tell the true story except for two: Cowtown recorded 0 sacks and 0 QB pressures. The Gwinnett offensive line put on a dominating show of blocking. With all day to throw and McCoy carrying the load on the ground, the first wildcard game of the EFL's first wildcard weekend was a leisurely walk in the park for **Big Ben**.

DR. McCHAD'S POST-SEASON POST-MORTEM

As we turn our attention exclusively to the 10 post-season candidates for the championship, let us measure their worth indirectly by pausing one last time to look at those that failed to meet the playoff grade. As a certified Sports Coroner, it is my solemn duty to examine the fallen and determine what caused their failure. Here, dear Readers are my findings:

MOHAVE (8-8) – Cause of Death: *Fatal Fits*. The team that Fitz built was in the race up until the very end. That they were in the race at all came as a bit of a surprise. With Andrew Luck relegated to a back-up role and expectations low, Fitz was free to fire

away as he saw fit. His willingness to gamble meant that success came in fits and starts, as did failure. There was no predicting the good or the bad, or who it would come against. In the end, it was Fitz's fatal fits against the Chargers that killed their hopes. **PICKERING (8-8)** – Cause of Death: *Anemia*. The Spartans weren't really *bad*; they just weren't very strong. They took to the field like a contender would; and called the plays a contender would call. They had a quarterback with a history of contending and all the types of pieces a contender should have. But when playing other contenders they failed to contend. Try as they might, they just weren't strong enough, going 0-8 against teams with a winning record. Against other weaklings, however, they were king.

DURHAM (7-8-1) – Cause of Death: *Slip and Fall*. Sometimes even the sure-footed slip and fall. They never see it coming, and neither did the powerful Thunder Lizards see this season coming. With good reason they expected to contend for a title and boldly went forth to conquer. But whether it was a missed chip shot field goal, an untimely interception, a bad day for Drew Brees, or a defensive collapse, they just kept stepping on banana peels. Eventually, they started looking for them and lost their way.

YORK (7-9) – Cause of Death: *York Disease*. When doctors can't fit what they see into a familiar shape they create a new disease. A team that beats Aurora by a lot and loses to South Carolina cannot be easily diagnosed. Deficiencies at wide receiver and running back need not be fatal on a team with an elite quarterback and a good defence. Yet something continues to be wrong with this team year after year and putting a finger on it eludes even me. Call it 'York Disease.'

CHINO (7-9) – Cause of Death: *Cam-cer*. This year was supposed to be different. Cam Newton would no longer have to do it alone; the pieces were in place to enable him to be all that he could be. And he ended up being crap. His final numbers do not reflect how very crap he was, inflated as they were by big games against the likes of Erieau and Mission Viejo. He showed occasional flashes of better times, but mostly his huge ego tied itself to the team like an anchor, keeping it from moving forward.

CHARLESWOOD (7-9) – Cause of Death: *Blake Plague*. The second coming of Blake Bortles was anything but heavenly. Instead, he led the defending champs into a bleak and comfortless purgatory. Nobody expected him to be Peyton Manning in his prime, but some semblance of first round pedigree would have given fans a reason to cheer. Sure, his receivers weren't great, but he certainly made none of them better. By season's end he looked as old and as feeble as his venerable back-up.

VIRDEN (7-9) – Cause of Death: *Carr Crash*. Hopes were surprisingly high for a team coming off a winless season in 2015. Derek Carr was one of the reasons, along with a splash of prime young talent chosen from the cream of two draft classes. A curious lack of team spirit and cohesion, exacerbated by multiple injuries and a patchwork offensive line, took a toll on the bottom line. As the pressure of the playoff race grew, a harried Carr threw wildly to drop-prone receivers and the offence crashed.

SOUTH CAROLINA (5-11) – Cause of Death: *Exhaustion*. The Regulators charged hard out of the gate and held a share of first place after 5 weeks. Then, one by one, their stars began to fall – first Keenan Allen; then Luke Kuechly; then Tamba Hali and others less well known but integral to the whole. Those still standing worked double shifts trying to keep it together over a 9-game losing streak. Seeking to throw his team out of trouble, Kirk Cousins' arm went from shotgun to pop gun in the final weeks.

CARTHAGE (5-11) – Cause of Death: *Fatal Arrhythmia*. When he went down to injury in Week 2 it became even more abundantly clear that Marcus Mariota was the heart of this team. Even the defence played better when he was in the game. It was, however, a young and developing heart that pumped blood through the frail body of the Cannibals. The strain of constant exertion and mental stress turned his play into a frenetic string of ups and downs – an adrenaline-fueled frenzy that ended finally in collapse.

NEW JERSEY (5-11) – Cause of Death: *Multiple Wounds*. A better name for this team would have been the Wrecked Balls. Like a victim of a head-on, high-speed collision the Wrecking Balls sustained multiple fractures and contusions that would have killed most teams. There was nothing they could do while recuperating in the intensive care unit. But, miraculously, they survived and went on to lead a meaningful and relatively successful final five weeks of the season, eventually passing quietly in their sleep.

MISSION VIEJO (5-11) – Cause of Death: *Neglect*. The Monarchs entered the season as one of the league's up-and-comers – a fringe contender for a playoff spot. An assembly of veteran and rising young talent looked more than capable of breaking even and possibly much more, with a little luck. Early on it became apparent that while the lights were on at HMK Royal Stadium, nobody was home. King Ferraro continued his ceremonial duties as team figurehead, but coach sightings were rare. There was no plan, no strategy, and ultimately nothing close to a playoff berth.

SCARBOROUGH (4-12) – Cause of Death: *Mystic Curse*. In terms of talent, the 2016 edition of the Blue Eagles was not overstocked as in previous disastrous seasons. But the team had enough punch on both sides of the ball to fight their way into a playoff spot in an expansion year. Of course, the team never came close to competing and by the end of the year were pushovers for those teams that were. As usual, they made lots of mistakes. But they also suffered horrendous luck – *supernaturally* bad luck!

TORONTO (3-13) – Cause of Death: *Youthful Exuberance*. The Wolverines were born young and stayed young throughout the year. They enjoyed the blessings of youth – virility, hope, courage, and beginner's luck – as well as the great curse of youth: a blind sense of invincibility. They threw themselves into every game and against every opponent thinking they could win; and the odd time, through sheer intrepidity and dumb luck, they did. But mostly they lost. Still, they were good; and only the good die young.

ERIEAU (0-16) – Cause of Death: *Stillborn*. The pre-season ultrasound detected false signs of life in the Cadillac due to the acquisitions of veterans Tony Romo, Marshawn Lynch, and superstar defender Justin Houston. But as soon as the regular season was born, it was obvious that something was terribly wrong. Romo hardly played, Lynch played badly, and after Houston went down in Week 5 the defence got better, but not good enough. For 16 weeks, opponents feasted on candy from this dead baby.

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PACIFIC CONFERENCE QUARTER FINALS

LOS ANGELES @ TWIN CITIES (line – TRIUMPH by 10)

INJURIES: Los Angeles – Le'Veon Bell (OUT), Robert Quinn (OUT); Twin Cities – Oday Aboushi (OUT).

There really is just one hope for a Knights win and that is that their quarterback will suddenly revert to the form he displayed with fair consistency over the first 12 weeks of the season. With the exception of a strong outing against the feeble Monarchs in Week 15 and a 6-for-6 flurry on the final game-winning drive last week in the wildcard game, Teddy Bridgewater has looked mostly lost since leading his team to 9-3 and the top spot in the West. Right now the Knights look like the team many had predicted would finish 3rd or 4th in their division: a team with a championship defence and a second rate offence. The Triumph are looking unassailable in their quest for a Conference title, with the no.2 ranked offence in the league and a defence ranked even higher than the legendary 'Blue Shield,' But if the regular season match-up between these two teams is any indication, their one vulnerability here may be ball security. That game provides both reason for hope and discouragement for Knights' fans. LA forced 5 Triumph turnovers to zero going the other way; yet all that did was keep the final score close in a loss. Twin Cities held the Knights to a piddling 110 net yards of offence while compiling more than 500 yards of their own. Without those turnovers the game would have been a total blowout. The other thing the Knights did well was contain Antonio Brown....all the way up until the point where he caught that game-winning 71-yard TD pass in the 4th quarter. Brown, like a thunder storm, cannot be stopped. But if Carson Palmer can be harassed and Doug Martin contained, there is a chance the Knights can keep this game close if their quarterback makes some plays. The double-digit line reflects the sensible bet that the turnover ratio won't be so skewed this time. But it does not account for the statistical probability that Bridgewater will play better his second time around. I am banking on it. **PICK: LOS ANGELES**

BROOKLIN @ IOWA CITY (line – CUBS by 7)

INJURIES: Brooklin – Zach Hocker (OUT), Charles Johnson (OUT), Antrel Rolle (OUT); Iowa City– None.

When the Hawks traveled to Joe Ferguson Stadium in Week 14 they held a 3-point lead deep into the 3rd quarter before the wheels came off. A combination of Russell Wilson's 4th quarter magic and the Hawks' 4th quarter hex turned what had been a close game into a rout for the Cubbies. If football were just three periods instead of four quarters the Hawks would probably be hosting this game. Instead, their inability to hold a lead placed their very playoff existence in peril this year, making them fortunate to win the softest division in the league. Historically, this franchise has always been about extremes so this type of drama is to be expected. But it makes outcomes difficult to predict. Probably the surest bet of all is to take the 'over,' pegged at 46. Both these teams are offence-oriented. There is a prevalent myth that the Cubs' defence is one of the league's best; and certainly there are names on the squad and three shutouts to their credit to support that bias. But the reality is that the Cubs give up a lot of yards against capable teams and generate few turnovers, leaning on a bend-not-break approach to limit opponents to field goal attempts. They can be run against and the Hawks are by far the most efficient rushing team in the league, averaging an incredible 6.3 yards per carry. That average is augmented by the ever-present danger posed by Brooklin's air weapons, DeAndre Hopkins and Rob Gronkowski, who can never be left unattended. The Cubs' offence is also right up there with the league's best. This is mostly due to the accuracy and mobility of Russell Wilson operating behind one of the league's most imposing offensive lines. Tavon Austin is an intriguing multiple threat, but otherwise Wilson is forced to squeeze the most out of a rather mediocre supporting cast. This game will probably come down to which team can make a stop first or generate the first big turnover. Expect sparks to fly and a couple of big stands by the Cub's D to set the stage for another 4th quarter collapse by the Hawks. **PICK: IOWA CITY**

ATLANTIC CONFERENCE QUARTER FINALS

GWINNETT @ SEBASTIAN (line – SWORDFISH by 9)

INJURIES: Gwinnett – Sergi Brown (QUESTIONABLE), Kyle Williams (OUT); Sebastian – Denzel Perryman (OUT).

The Glads hit their first road block of the year back in Week 4 in Sebastian. That was Jameis Winston's first career start and it was a memorable one as he carpet bombed the Gwinnett defence for 380 yards and 3 TDs, without the benefit of Odell Beckham Jr for most of that game. Star running back LeSean McCoy was having his worst game of the year before he suffered a hamstring pull in the third quarter that knocked him out for five weeks. It was a game the Glads would rather forget. But when they go back and look at film to see how a saucer-eyed rookie was able to make fools out of their secondary they will see the likes of CJ Anderson, Doug Baldwin and Danny Amendola doing most of the dirty work, giving opportunities for the athletic Winston to make a few plays of his own. Add in Beckham, Justin Forsett and an unsung but stout offensive line and it is no wonder that the Swordfish have been successful regardless of who starts at QB. They would prefer, however, to start Andy Dalton and the 'Red Rifle' is fully loaded for this game. The Glads will be hard-pressed to stop Sebastian, but with the return of Jarvis Landry, and McCoy and Jeremy Maclin hitting their stride, they could keep pace if Joe Thomas and the rest of the line are able to keep Sebastian's bookend pass rushers Chandler Jones and Carlos Dunlap out of the backfield. Too many "ifs" and "coulds" for Gwinnett match up poorly against Sebastian's "wills" and "probablys." Expect the Fish to break out of the gate quickly and to stay ahead. **PICK: SEBASTIAN**

MARKHAM @ AURORA (line – MUSTANGS by 9)

INJURIES: Markham – Corey Liuget (QUESTIONABLE); Aurora – None.

Among the final eight vying for the title of Champion, there is no hotter team than Aurora and no colder team than Markham. The Mustangs are riding a 13-game win streak and the Stars have lost 4 out of their last 5. The North Stars seem to have suffered a team concussion after taking a 52-point haymaker from the Swordfish in Week 12 and getting straight-jacketed by an Auroran sleeper hold the next week. They have not been the same since. The haters who disparaged Tyrod Taylor may turn out to be right after all. But to blame Taylor for everything would be foolish. He has had just one really bad game, against Aurora; and...hey...wait a sec! Isn't that the same Aurora he must get past here to keep the Markham championship dream alive? It is no mystery why Taylor would struggle against Aurora. The Mustangs' corners are the elite of the elite, fully capable of manning up in single coverage against Markham's stud receivers, Brandon Marshall and Demaryius Thomas. Take away Markham's usual WR-to-CB mismatch and the game gets much more complicated, especially when star safety valve, Jordan Reed, is being covered by Earl Thomas. The Stars are not going to score a ton of points, even if Taylor finds a way to adjust to the All Pros arrayed against him. But a few plays by Taylor could be enough if the Markham defence comes to play. Matt Ryan has been more like his old self of late, but even in success there are echoes of the reckless daredevil who threw 11 interceptions in 6 games to start the season. The North Stars will be looking to bring that side out while simultaneously setting a trap for rookie Kenyan Drake. Never count the Stars out of anything. **PICK: MARKHAM**



ANCIENT HISTORY
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This Week in EFL History
With Professor Sterling Smitherman

FROM THE EFL ARCHIVES – In the Week between the end of the EFL 2010 regular season and the beginning of the post-season all of the playoff teams were busily preparing for their quarter finals match-ups. The playoff format that year featured four teams in each eight-team conference battling it out in the first round. The two Division winners had home field advantage for the opening round while the two wildcard teams were seeded nos. 3 & 4; with 3 visiting the Division winner with the second best record and 4 visiting the top ranked division winner. There was of course

no opening round bye for any team. That privilege was only granted to the Championship finalists, who had two weeks to prepare for the big game.

In 2010 the quarter final round was considered by most to be a formality. In the PAC, the Patriots were 7-point favourites at home against the Knights and the Convicts were 8-point favourites at home against the Golden Bears of Kutztown. In the CAC, the Dragons were favoured by 10 points over Ringgold while the Spartans were 8-point favourites over the Thunder Lizards. These were all unusually high spreads for an EFL post-season. But then this was really the first year that league power was so heavily concentrated at the very top of each division.

Few of the major odds-makers were predicting first round upsets. Jimmy the Geek raised some eyebrows when he confidently predicted that the Knights would win outright over the Patriots. However, that may have been for the show of it. The years have shown that Jimmy loathes picking all favourites in the first round. The most likely team, in theory, to score an upset, was Durham. But like this year, in 2010 they were plagued with bad luck and the Spartans were flying very high.