

2016

10

Est. 2007

CONFERENCE

Celebrating our 10th year of football excellence

February 26, 2017

2016

10

Est. 2007

FINALS

EAST



BROOKLIN HAWKS

21



TWIN CITIES TRIUMPH

52



AURORA MUSTANGS

3



SEBASTAIN SWORDFISH

27

NORTH



ATLANTIC



SOUTH



STOMP'N ROMP!



Antonio Brown



Triumph WR, **Antonio Brown** (left) runs over Brooklin punter **Tim Masthay** on his way to an 89-yard punt return for a TD. Brown had 3 TDs as the Triumph stomped on the Hawks 52-21. Sebastian cornerback, **Delvin Breaux** (above), points to the cheering crowd at the Fish Tank after picking off **Matt Ryan** in the 2nd quarter. The Swordfish romped over Aurora, 27-3.



Who was slick in
the Conference
Finals

"BRYLCREEM" THE
EFL'S FIRST SPONSOR



Antonio Brown
WR
Twin Cities
Triumph

4 Rec, 85 yds, 2 TDs, 89-yard PR
TD. Unstoppable again!



Carlos Dunlap
DE
Sebastian
Swordfish

3 T, 2 SK, 2 HUR, 1 FF, 1 BLK FG.
Made big plays at big times.



21

GAME CENTER
2016

52

Brooklin

Pacific Conference Final

Twin Cities

TEAM LEADERS

Passing	Cmp	Att	Yds	TD
Smith	11	20	134	1
Rushing	Car	Yds	Avg	TD
Stewart	20	91	4.6	0
Receiving	Rec	Yds	Avg	TD
Hopkins	5	80	16.0	1

Team

Brooklin

1

2

3

4

OT

Total

0

7

7

7

-

21

Twin Cities

14

17

14

7

-

52

Play of the Game

In the 2nd quarter, Triumph leading 17-7, **Alex Smith** checked down to **Jerome Felton**. LB **Bobby Wagner** forced a fumble that was recovered by the Triumph at the Hawks' 39, leading to a TD.

TEAM LEADERS

Passing	Cmp	Att	Yds	TD
Palmer	22	33	257	4
Rushing	Car	Yds	Avg	TD
Martin	12	55	4.6	0
Receiving	Rec	Yds	Avg	TD
Brown	4	85	21.3	2

HIGH-FLYING TRIUMPH GROUND HAWKS!

FOUR FUMBLES TURN GAME INTO ROUT!

SUMMARY: In the spacious climate controlled comfort of sold out Wilhalla Stadium in Minneapolis the Triumph aimed to maintain their perfect 2016 record and advance to the historic 10th EFL Championship Game. The Hawks, riding a wave of confidence after upending the Cubs last week felt they could pull off another upset if they could just hold down **Antonio Brown**. The Triumph started with the ball first and Brown did not get a look over a 13-play series that brought them to the Brooklin 11. But on the 14th play, with the Hawks guarding the back of the end zone, **Carson Palmer** targeted Brown underneath for an 11-yard TD pass and the opening score. The Hawks' opening series ended inauspiciously with a 13-yard sack of **Alex Smith** by **Jurrell Casey** and a 4th & 27 punt from their 40 yard line. That's when Brown stung the Hawks a second time, darting 89 yards to the house on the return to put Twin Cities up 14-0. Brooklin responded with a heavy dose of **Jonathan Stewart** on the ground that softened up the defence for **Ryan Mathews**, who finished off the 73-yard drive with 14-yard pitch. But the Hawks would get no closer the rest of the day. **Bobby Wagner** forced a **Jerome Felton** fumble at the Brooklin 39 to set up a 1-yard TD dive by **Shane Vereen** to make it 24-7 with 0:29 seconds left. But the Triumph were not finished. Special team star **Ben Heeney** forced a **Keith Mumphery** fumble on the ensuing kickoff return and Palmer converted the short field into a quick march ending with a 9-yard TD pass to **Tyler Eifert** for a 31-7 half time lead. The Hawks would need a near-miracle to come back from such a deficit on the road, but a big break early in the 3rd made it look possible. **Janoris Jenkins** wrestled away the ball from **Charles Clay** for an interception at the Triumph 20. Smith hit **DeAndre Hopkins** for a TD on the next play to shave the margin to 31-14. But the Triumph took back the initiative on their next series, covering 80 yards in 12 plays, including a 38-yard run by Vereen to set up a 3-yard TD pass to Clay to make it 38-14. The Triumph all but iced the game late in the 3rd when Palmer took advantage of a run-key to find Brown wide open deep for a 45-yard TD pass. After the Hawks added a token TD off 12 straight runs, the Triumph punctuated the rout with a 60-yard fumble recovery for a TD by **Darius Slay**.

QUOTES: "We made too many mistakes today, myself included. You can't give the ball away against them and expect to escape with a win. I thought our overall strategy was effective, but we slipped up at key moments and that turned it into a really bad day!" – Brooklin coach, **Tom Jones**.
 "We were fortunate again to have things go our way. We adjusted well to their efforts to take Antonio away from us, but if we don't recover four fumbles it is a much closer game. We still have plenty of work to do!" – Twin Cities coach, **Guy Williams**.



ANGRY FAN



titter

HAPPY FAN



Bird Man of Brooklin @BirdMan

Lots of problems for the Hawks today
– too many for 140 characters or less.



Lars Odegard @LarsValhalla

This is what happens when you take
Antonio Brown "out" of the game. 10-0
record at Wilhalla Stadium. Next stop –
Canton!



Brooklin 21 Twin Cities 52



	1	2	3	4	F
Brooklin	0	7	7	7	21
Twin Cities	14	17	14	7	52

* Playoff * 02-26-2017 Temp:70 Wind: No Line MVP:Brown HFA:ON(0)

1	7:22	Twin Cities	TD	Palmer 11 pass to Brown (Aguayo) (13-77-7:33)	0-7
1	3:27	Twin Cities	TD	Brown 89 punt return (Aguayo)	0-14
2	9:36	Brooklin	TD	Mathews 14 run (Parkey) (14-73-8:45)	7-14
2	3:56	Twin Cities	FG	Aguayo 28 (10-64-5:29)	7-17
2	0:29	Twin Cities	TD	Vereen 1 run (Aguayo) (8-44-1:22)	7-24
2	0:00	Twin Cities	TD	Palmer 9 pass to Eifert (Aguayo) (3-31-0:25)	7-31
3	12:07	Brooklin	TD	Smith 20 pass to Hopkins (Parkey) (1-20-0:08)	14-31
3	5:57	Twin Cities	TD	Palmer 3 pass to Clay (Aguayo) (12-80-6:03)	14-38
3	0:35	Twin Cities	TD	Palmer 45 pass to Brown (Aguayo) (3-65-1:39)	14-45
4	7:27	Brooklin	TD	Smith 10 run (Parkey) (12-80-8:08)	21-45
4	5:41	Twin Cities	TD	Slay 60 yd fumble recovery (Aguayo)	21-52

Player Stats

Passing	Att	Cmp	Yds	25	In	Td	Sk	Rate
Smith	20	11	134	0	0	1	3	92.5
	20	11	134	0	0	1	3	92.5

Rushing	Att	Yds	Avg	FD	10	Lg	Td
Stewart	20	91	4.6	6	0	9	0
Williams,K	7	45	6.4	2	3	12	0
Mathews	3	40	13.3	1	2	18	1
Smith	6	15	2.5	2	1	10	1
	36	191	5.3	11	6	18	2

Receiving	No	Dp	Att	Yds	Avg	FD	25	Lg	Td
Hopkins	5	0	9	80	16.0	5	0	22	1
Jeffery	2	0	4	13	6.5	0	0	7	0
Gronkowski	2	0	4	23	11.5	0	0	14	0
Felton	2	0	2	18	9.0	1	0	10	0
Mathews	0	0	1	0	0.0	0	0	0	0
	11	0	20	134	12.2	6	0	22	1

Fumbles	No	Rec	Td
Jeffery	2	0	0
Stewart	1	0	0
Felton	1	0	0
Mumphery	1	0	0
Warford	0	1	0
	5	1	0

Kick Returns	No	Yds	Avg	Lg	Td
Mumphery	4	121	30.3	39	0
Murphy	1	35	35.0	35	0
	5	156	31.2	39	0

Punt Returns	No	Fc	Yds	Avg	Lg	Td
Mumphery	0	1	0	0.0	0	0
	0	1	0	0.0	0	0

Kicking	FG	Lg	XP	Pts
Parkey	0-0	0	3-3	3

Punting	No	Yds	Avg	Tb	20	Bk	Lg
Masthay	4	187	46.8	0	2	0	55

Defense	Tkl	Sk	Def	Stf	Hur	FF	Int
Mathews	8	1	0	1	2	0	0-0
Demps	6	0	1	0	0	0	0-0
Burfict	6	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Grimes	5	0	0	0	0	0	1-16
Golden	5	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Williams,B	4	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Ryan	4	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Jenkins	3	0	1	0	0	0	1-1
McCoy	2	0	0	1	3	0	0-0
Foster	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Tapper	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Apple	1	0	0	1	0	0	0-0
Tuitt	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
	47	1	2	3	5	0	2-17

Passing	Att	Cmp	Yds	25	In	Td	Sk	Rate
Palmer	33	22	257	1	2	4	1	104.4
	33	22	257	1	2	4	1	104.4

Rushing	Att	Yds	Avg	FD	10	Lg	Td
Martin,D	12	55	4.6	2	2	12	0
West	6	44	7.3	2	2	17	0
Vereen	3	42	14.0	2	1	38	1
Jackson	1	0	0.0	0	0	0	0
Cutler	1	-1	-1.0	0	0	0	0
	23	140	6.1	6	5	38	1

Receiving	No	Dp	Att	Yds	Avg	FD	25	Lg	Td
Clay	7	0	8	65	9.3	4	0	18	1
Vereen	4	0	4	31	7.8	3	0	10	0
Eifert	4	1	9	42	10.5	4	0	14	1
Brown	4	0	7	85	21.3	4	1	45	2
Martin,D	2	0	3	16	8.0	0	0	9	0
Mathews	1	0	2	18	18.0	1	0	18	0
	22	1	33	257	11.7	16	1	45	4

Fumbles	No	Rec	Td
Bradham	0	1	0
Hughes	0	1	0
Slay	0	1	1
Wagner	0	1	0
	0	4	1

Kick Returns	No	Yds	Avg	Lg	Td
Vereen	2	38	19.0	24	0
Wheaton	1	22	22.0	22	0
	3	60	20.0	24	0

Punt Returns	No	Fc	Yds	Avg	Lg	Td
Brown	2	0	86	43.0	89	1
	2	0	86	43.0	89	1

Kicking	FG	Lg	XP	Pts
Aguayo	1-1	28	7-7	10

Punting	No	Yds	Avg	Tb	20	Bk	Lg
Jones	1	49	49.0	0	0	0	49

Defense	Tkl	Sk	Def	Stf	Hur	FF	Int
Hughes	8	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Searcy	7	0	0	0	0	1	0-0
Wagner	4	0	0	1	0	1	0-0
Roby	4	0	0	0	0	1	0-0
Slay	4	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Casey	3	2	1	0	1	0	0-0
Ansah	3	1	0	0	2	0	0-0
Harris Jr.	3	0	0	0	0	1	0-0
Freeman	3	0	1	0	0	0	0-0
Melton	2	0	0	0	1	0	0-0
Heeney	2	0	0	0	0	1	0-0
Gholston	2	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Maxwell	2	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Banks	2	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Crawford	1	0	0	1	1	0	0-0
Marsh	1	0	0	1	0	0	0-0
Holmes	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
	52	3	2	3	5	5	0-0

M.V.P.

Antonio Brown
TWIN CITIES

4 catches, 85 yards, 2 TDs + 1 PR TD.
Made his mark despite double-teams

	Brooklin	Twin Cities
First Downs	18	23
Rushes	36-191	23-140
Passes	20-11-134	33-22-257
Sacked	3-27	1-8
Fumble	5	0
Penalties	3-25	4-34
Turnovers	4	2
Missed Tackles	4	7
Dropped Passes	0	1
Bad Passes	3	1
Passes 25+	0	1
Runs 10+	6	5
Blitzes	13	0
Time	32:29	27:31
Third Down	3-10	7-11
Fourth Down	1-2	1-1
Red Att/Td/Fg	4/3/0	5/4/1
Net Offense	298	389



3



27

Aurora

Atlantic Conference Final

Sebastian

TEAM LEADERS

Passing	Cmp	Att	Yds	TD
Ryan	26	46	303	0
Rushing	Car	Yds	Avg	TD
Drake	7	55	7.9	0
Receiving	Rec	Yds	Avg	TD
Gillmore	4	99	24.8	0

Team	1	2	3	4	OT	Total
Aurora	0	3	0	0	-	3
Sebastian	7	3	7	10	-	27

Play of the Game

At 9:26 in the 3rd quarter, with Sebastian leading 10-3, **Sharrif Floyd** stripped the ball from **Matt Ryan** and the Swordfish recovered at the Aurora 37, setting up a decisive TD drive.

TEAM LEADERS

Passing	Cmp	Att	Yds	TD
Dalton	11	25	114	1
Rushing	Car	Yds	Avg	TD
Anderson	13	67	5.2	0
Receiving	Rec	Yds	Avg	TD
Baldwin	3	47	15.7	1

SWORDFISH DEFENCE STEALS GAME!

MUSTANGS' SHOT AT HISTORY ENDS IN SEBASTIAN!

SUMMARY: On a warm and windless day inside the semi-enclosed confines of the Fish Bowl, the two hottest teams in the Atlantic Conference met for the first time this year. The debate about which team was better would finally be settled. It was not just bragging rights on the line – a trip to the final was at stake. The Mustangs looked to make a record 3rd straight appearance in the big game while the Swordfish hoped to make their first trip to the final. The visitors threatened first after a 55-yard pass to **Crockett Gilmore** brought them deep into Sebastian territory. But after coming up just short of the 1st down at the 13, **Mason Crosby** missed the 31-yard FG attempt. It would not remain scoreless for long. Sebastian steadily moved the ball on the ground, with a 20-yard run by **Justin Forsett** propelling them into Aurora territory. With the Mustangs close to the line, **Andy Dalton** went deep to **Odell Beckham Jr** for a 33-yard TD pass and a 7-0 lead. Bolstered by runs of 21 and 22 yards by **Kenyan Drake**, the Mustangs countered with a big drive from their 22 yard line down to the Sebastian 2. But on 3rd & goal, Drake was stopped at the line by a stack of Swordfish. This time Crosby made the 20-yarder to get the visitors on the board. A **Delvin Beaux** interception of **Matt Ryan** in Aurora territory set up a 45-yard **Adam Vinatieri** FG to re-establish the 7-point lead for Sebastian. The Mustangs retaliated with a strong drive to the Sebastian red zone but again they were stopped and forced to attempt the field goal. **Carlos Dunlap** penetrated the Aurora line and blocked the attempt, keeping the score 10-3 at half time. The Mustangs' first possession of the 2nd half brought trouble. **Sharrif Floyd** stripped the ball from Ryan and the Swordfish recovered at the Aurora 37. A penalty against the Mustangs on 4th down kept the Sebastian drive alive and two plays later **Kenneth Dixon** skirted around right tackle for a 10-yard TD to make it 17-3. The Mustangs pushed back once more into the Swordfish red zone but a 15-yard tripping penalty and a 9-yard strip sack by Dunlap thwarted the chance and gave the Swordfish the ball at their 38. They went on to score a TD, with Dixon getting his second of the day on an 11-yard pitch, to make it 24-3. The Fish tacked on a FG and held off a desperate but futile effort by the Mustangs to get back in the game.

QUOTES: "No secret what happened here. We gave the ball away four times and did not take it away once. Otherwise, I thought we played well and could have won. Congratulations to Russ and them on a great season!" – Aurora coach, **Rich Liotta**.

"I was born in a small town. I live in a small town. And I'll probably die in a small town. This one is for all of the people of my small town!" – Sebastian coach, **Russ Lemmon**.



ANGRY FAN



titter

HAPPY FAN



Granny Gee @ggee2

The people of Garland TX are with the people of Aurora ON at this very sad time!



Jean Boisvert @JB-SwamplandP

Am I dreaming this? The Swordfish are going to the Gale Sayers Game!



Aurora 3 Sebastian 27



	1	2	3	4	F
Aurora	0	3	0	0	3
Sebastian	7	3	7	10	27

* Playoff * 02-21-2017 The Fish Tank Temp:76 Wind: No Line MVP:Breaux H

1	1:45	Sebastian	TD	Dalton 33 pass to Baldwin (Vinatieri) (11-79-6:12)	0-7
2	10:04	Aurora	FG	Crosby 20 (12-76-6:30)	3-7
2	5:54	Sebastian	FG	Vinatieri 45 (4-2-1:27)	3-10
3	5:43	Sebastian	TD	Dixon 10 run (Vinatieri) (7-37-3:43)	3-17
4	10:06	Sebastian	TD	Dixon 11 run (Vinatieri) (8-93-3:54)	3-24
4	4:13	Sebastian	FG	Vinatieri 29 (11-34-5:31)	3-27

Player Stats

Passing	Att	Cmp	Yds	25	In	Td	Sk	Rate
Ryan	46	26	303	2	2	0	5	58.5
	46	26	303	2	2	0	5	58.5

Rushing	Att	Yds	Avg	FD	10	Lg	Td
Drake	7	55	7.9	3	2	22	0
Jennings	6	48	8.0	2	2	21	0
Ryan	2	14	7.0	1	1	10	0
	15	117	7.8	6	5	22	0

Receiving	No	Dp	Att	Yds	Avg	FD	25	Lg	Td
Drake	7	0	9	48	6.9	2	0	15	0
Edelman	6	0	11	62	10.3	4	0	16	0
Boldin	4	0	12	40	10.0	2	0	14	0
Gillmore	4	1	5	99	24.8	4	2	55	0
Coleman	3	0	6	35	11.7	1	0	14	0
Colek	1	0	2	10	10.0	0	0	10	0
Jennings	1	0	1	9	9.0	1	0	9	0
	26	1	46	303	11.7	14	2	55	0

Fumbles	No	Rec	Td
Ryan	3	0	0
Williams,T	0	1	0
	3	1	0

Kick Returns	No	Yds	Avg	Lg	Td
Clay	2	14	7.0	9	0
Drake	1	13	13.0	13	0
Whitehair	1	13	13.0	13	0
Coleman	1	11	11.0	11	0
Greco	1	6	6.0	6	0
	6	57	9.5	13	0

Punt Returns	No	Fc	Yds	Avg	Lg	Td
Clay	3	0	2	0.7	5	0
	3	0	2	0.7	5	0

Kicking	FG	Lg	XP	Pts
Crosby	1-3	20	0-0	3

Punting	No	Yds	Avg	Tb	20	Bk	Lg
Koch	2	92	46.0	0	0	0	46

Defense	Tkl	Sk	Def	Str	Hur	FF	Int
Bowman	10	0	0	2	0	0	0-0
Jenkins	8	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Thompson	7	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Weddle	4	0	2	0	0	0	0-0
Peterson	3	0	1	0	0	0	0-0
Watt	3	0	0	0	1	0	0-0
Dansby	3	0	0	1	0	0	0-0
Jackson	2	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Norman	2	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Bailey	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Robinson	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Thomas,E	0	0	1	0	0	0	0-0
	44	0	4	3	1	0	0-0

Passing	Att	Cmp	Yds	25	In	Td	Sk	Rate
Dalton	25	11	114	1	0	1	0	71.1
	25	11	114	1	0	1	0	71.1

Rushing	Att	Yds	Avg	FD	10	Lg	Td
Anderson	13	67	5.2	4	2	14	0
Forsett	8	62	7.8	3	2	20	0
Dixon,K	6	34	5.7	3	2	11	2
Dalton	7	11	1.6	2	0	6	0
	34	174	5.1	12	6	20	2

Receiving	No	Dp	Att	Yds	Avg	FD	25	Lg	Td
Beckham Jr.	3	0	11	38	12.7	2	0	23	0
Baldwin	3	0	3	47	15.7	1	1	33	1
Forsett	3	0	4	17	5.7	0	0	8	0
Anderson	1	0	1	6	6.0	0	0	6	0
Watson	1	0	3	6	6.0	0	0	6	0
Dixon,K	0	0	2	0	0.0	0	0	0	0
Walford	0	0	1	0	0.0	0	0	0	0
	11	0	25	114	10.4	3	1	33	1

Fumbles	No	Rec	Td
Colvin	0	1	0
Perryman	0	1	0
	0	2	0

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

Punt Returns	No	Fc	Yds	Avg	Lg	Td
Amendola	1	0	1	1.0	1	0
	1	0	1	1.0	1	0

Kicking	FG	Lg	XP	Pts
Vinatieri	2-2	45	3-3	9

Punting	No	Yds	Avg	Tb	20	Bk	Lg
Berry	4	182	45.5	1	2	0	50

Defense	Tkl	Sk	Def	Str	Hur	FF	Int
Posluszny	9	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Breaux	8	0	3	0	0	0	1-0
Perryman	5	0	1	0	0	0	0-0
Attachou	4	0	0	2	0	0	0-0
Dunlap	3	2	0	0	2	1	0-0
Floyd	3	1	0	0	2	1	0-0
Thurmond	3	0	1	0	1	0	0-0
Chung	3	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Worley	2	0	1	0	0	0	1-16
Clowney	2	1	1	0	0	0	0-0
Colvin	2	0	1	0	0	0	0-0
Dixon,B	2	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Ladouceur	2	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Doss	2	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Jones	1	1	1	0	2	1	0-0
Simmons	1	0	1	0	0	0	0-0
Perry	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Kikaha	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Abdul-Quddu	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Berry	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
	56	5	10	2	7	3	2-16

M.V.P.



**CARLOS DUNLAP
SEBASTIAN**

3 Tackles, 2 Sacks, 2 QB Hur., 1 FF, 1
FG Blk. Strip-sack of Ryan pivotal.

	Aurora	Sebastian
First Downs	21	17
Rushes	15-117	34-174
Passes	46-26-303	25-11-114
Sacked	5-39	0-0
Fumble	3	0
Penalties	8-71	2-20
Turnovers	4	0
Missed Tackles	10	6
Dropped Passes	1	0
Bad Passes	3	5
Passes 25+	2	1
Runs 10+	5	6
Blitzes	8	18
Time	28:37	31:23
Third Down	3-12	4-13
Fourth Down	1-2	2-2
Red Att/Td/Fg	4/0/1	4/2/1
Net Offense	381	288



AROUND THE

10 EFL 10

With Spats McChad

NEW YORK – Now that *that* is over with, let's all move on to the main attraction! By "*that*," I am referring to the self-immolations that occurred in Twin Cities and Sebastian in front of a national TV audience last Sunday. Four turnovers each for the losers; zero for the winners, tilting the tables even more steeply to the advantage of the favourites. Nobody should have to witness such a spectacle: two healthy young teams in the prime of their development setting themselves on fire – sacrificing their aspirations so that the two teams with the best records would appear in the historic 10th EFL Championship Game.

The Triumph and the Swordfish could have won on their own merits. Instead they were handed their victories with hardly a fight. The Hawks were not toast by half time, they were smoking cinders. The Mustangs took longer to flame out, but by mid-way through the third quarter they were well-done and heading for the ash heap. These were not so much "games" as they were ritual sacrifices to the Football Gods and burnt offerings to the dreaded EFL Committee.

The nebulous union of man-demons that runs the EFL desperately needed a prime match-up to attract fans to the wasteland of Canton they had handpicked to host the 10th edition of their main event. In addition to being the best teams that the 2016 regular season had to offer, both Twin Cities and Sebastian also happened to be products of the 2012 Expansion and served as choice examples of the league's most treasured ethos: competition. There had been numerous other examples of teams turning their fortunes around in short order thanks to the league's competitive framework. But for those who had criticized the expansion format as being too punitive, the presence of Sebastian and Twin Cities together in the Championship Game, a mere five years after entering the league, was a standing rebuke – an end to the debate before it even started.

But while the playoffs "got it right" this year, I am disappointed that there wasn't a little more doubt that they would. The Hawks can perhaps be partially excused for their Conference Final ineptness – after all, they had barely prevailed over expansion St. Charles in the 'Baltic Avenue' of divisions. But they did boast the third best offence in the league and had knocked off a cocky Cubs team at Joe Ferguson Stadium the week before. Momentum was on their side and all the pressure was on Twin Cities. Yet it was the Hawks that played tight and nervous, like they had never been under the bright lights playing in front of 66,500 screaming fans before. Oh yeah! They probably hadn't; not since the last time they visited Twin Cities back in Week 12. Playing in front of 17,000 fans shivering in unprotected bleachers in Optimist Park doesn't prepare a team for such big moments.

The Mustangs had no excuse. While there were signs early in the season that they had a game like this in them, nobody – including me – imagined they would be held to 3 points! It was another piss poor performance by the offensive line in a big game. But the blame can be spread around to just about every player on the offence. Except, possibly, **Kenyan Drake** and **Greg Jennings**, who did what little they could to prop up the disjointed, self-destructive passing attack awkwardly directed by a bumbling **Matt Ryan**, who quite possibly was experiencing flashbacks to the sack barrage he was subjected to in last year's Championship loss to the Patriots. Despite the shakiness, the Mustangs still managed to move the ball four times into the Sebastian red zone; but because of it, they managed just one measly field goal.

Aurora's offensive fizzle came on a day when its defence was making **Andy Dalton** look even more frazzled than Ryan in the pocket. The Swordfish passing game was nothing to write home about. But it did make one really nice play at the right time: a 33-yard perfect spiral from Dalton to **Doug Baldwin** for the game's first score and only TD through the air. Apart from that, they can thank their running game and the short field created by four Mustangs turnovers for kick-starting their league no.1 ranked offence. My 'Spats Game Ball' goes equally to **Carlos Dunlap** (2 sacks, 1 blocked a field goal, and a critical forced fumble) and **Delvin Breaux** (crucial interception in 2nd quarter and 3 pass break-ups). Big time plays by their defence against a jittery Mustangs' offence carried the day for the Fish.

This now brings me to the coming showdown between the two alumni of the Expansion Class of 2012: all the signs point to a Twin Cities victory in the big game. I have many reasons for thinking it will be so, but to isolate the decisive factor, I'll just say that I have a lot more confidence in **Carson Palmer** than I have in **Andy Dalton** to keep it together under duress. **Carlos Dunlap** and **Chandler Jones** could yet blow up that confidence, but I trust that Twin Cities coach **Guy Williams** will find a way to reduce their impact; while I am not certain that **Russ Lemmon** can do anything about the '**Red Rifle**' misfiring under the pressure of trying to find targets cloaked by **Chris Harris Jr** and **Darius Slay**. Twin Cities 27; Sebastian 14.

HEADSETGATE

A throwaway line in an apologetic post-game press conference by Brooklin coach, **Tom Jones** has touched off a league-wide controversy, suggestions of cheating and calls for a league investigation into what writers are already referring to as 'Headsetgate.'

Jones had been asked about the unusual defensive formation his players had assumed when the Triumph had lined up for 1st & 10 at the Brooklin 11 yard line on the game's opening drive. Both safeties were at the very back of the end zone, while the corners were about one yard into the end zone and the outside linebackers were playing 5 yards off the line of scrimmage and shading to the outside while **Clay Matthews** stood close to the line. This left a massive hole in the middle of the secondary that a battleship could have sailed through. Facing this bizarre alignment, **Carson Palmer** simply glanced at **Antonio Brown**, who nodded back. Palmer then dropped back and delivered an easy lob to Brown, crossing the middle of this giant gap unopposed, for an easy opening touchdown.

"That was a definite miscommunication on that play," Jones replied. "We were experiencing headset problems. What I told Clay was to **prevent** Brown from crossing over the middle and for the guys to stay in their **zone**. All Clay heard were the words: 'prevent zone' because of the static and cut-outs. I could tell he looked confused so I told him to call a **timeout**. But all he heard was 'out' and that's why the linebackers abandoned the seams. I tried to signal a timeout myself but it was too late. Palmer saw his chance and quick-snapped us."

Jones later claimed that headset troubles were at the root of a questionable decision by **Keith Mumphery** to return a kickoff from the end zone with 0:25 left in the first half. Jones claims that he told his special teams coach to "take a knee **on a kick into the end zone**. We need to regroup in the locker room and **return** with a new game plan in the second half" but all that his assistant heard was the broken phrase 'on a kick into the end zone...return.' Mumphery fumbled at the 31 yard line and the Triumph came back with another touchdown as time ran out to build a virtually insurmountable 31-7 half time lead.

Jones said that he complained at half time and the problem was "fixed." He went on to bravely answer pointed questions from the media that focused on various aspects of his team's performance, all beginning with "were you surprised/expecting that...." and ending with phrases like "as badly as they did?" The Hawks had been clearly overmatched and claims of "headset issues" might have been summarily dismissed as a flimsy excuse for inexcusable coaching gaffes, except that after the press conference messages began popping up on **Titter™** and other social media about other teams experiencing headset problems at Wilhalla Stadium. Some examples:

'Went entire drive listening to Red Solo Cup at Big Will,' teeted **Josh McCown** of the Chargers.

'Had Rush Limbaugh in my ear for a whole quarter,' teeted **Cam Newton** of the Convicts.

'Headsets unusable at the Willy Dome!' teeted Virden linebacker, **Melvin Ingram**.

If the sudden influx of complaints is genuine (and not some overblown, kneejerk reaction to a team nobody is ranking among the Top 5 of all time going 18 games without a loss) faulty headset communications are apparently one of the very few, but persistent, problems at the shining new Willhalla Stadium. It is a curious problem to have for a cutting edge facility that features electronic drone food and drink delivery service for season ticket holders.

Charger head coach, **Mike Martz**, perhaps still sore from the Week Two beating his team received at the grand opening of Wilhalla Stadium in Week Two, seemed more willing than other coaches or owners to publicly suggest that something suspicious might be going on in Twin Cities.

"I don't know. I'm no electronics expert. But it seems like this is radio stuff is pretty basic," Martz posted on his **Mugshot©** page. "It's been around since Paul Revere radioed that the British were coming back in the Civil War. I would think the companies that make our radio equipment know what they are doing by now. So what is causing these problems at Wilhalla?"

Apart from announcing to the world that he is no history expert either, Martz did not make any concrete allegations or statements of fact on which an investigation could possibly be based. Yet his open questioning and speculation was seized on by a mainstream media looking for any kind of story angle to spice up what had been, by any measure, a bad weekend for football ratings. Within 24 hours of these revelations, a burgeoning scandal was brewing. Reputable people were scrambling to come up with answers to aggressive questioning from reporters and, in their haste, coming across sounding less than forthright and overly defensive.

Olaf Magnusson, a direct descendent of a medieval King of Norway and President of the Wilhalla Foundation, a non-governmental organization dedicated to promoting a positive image of Vikings and Viking culture, was first to go on the record publicly, decrying the controversy as "*manufactured and a direct attack on the Viking people and the Viking culture.*"

The Wilhalla Foundation is permanently represented on the stadium Board of Directors and the Foundation itself was closely involved as a consultant in the design and construction of the stadium. The two giant bronze ULFBERHT swords mounted over the main stadium entrance were designed and paid for by the Foundation. The addition of Lingonberry Mead and Vanilla Butternilk to the concession stands was also the Foundation's idea, although sales of both are reportedly slow.

Karl Bingunhopper, Chairman of the Willhalla Stadium Board, issued a terse statement promising that "*the stadium board will review the facts to determine whether the stadium is involved in any radio problem and take corrective measures if necessary.*"

Triumph coach, **Guy Williams** was cornered as he attempted to leave the stadium after the game and asked if he or the Triumph players had experienced any problems with radio communications over the headset during the game. Williams, unaware of what had been mentioned in the Jones press conference, appeared caught off guard, even a little annoyed by the question. He stammered out a clearly unrehearsed and superficial response that did nothing to calm the increasingly roiling waters: "*well...I mean...we all experience problems with those headsets from time to time. Depends where you're standing, I guess. I can't recall anything...ah....out of the ordinary tonight. Why the hell are you asking me that?*"

The "why-the-hell-are-you-asking-me-that" part of his answer made the reporters think they had drawn blood....or at least had

administered a firm pinch that would leave a mark for a few seconds. It was enough for the sharks to close in.

“Coach Williams, are you saying that your team had no problems with your radio communications and that you don’t care that your opponent couldn’t communicate during the game?” barked Deathspun reporter, **Marissa Jones-Abboud**, a young reporter looking to establish her reputation as a pit bull seeker of the truth; whether it was true or not.

Williams looked incredulously at her. “I didn’t say that. I don’t know what you’re talking about. Now excuse me people, the scrum is over,” and with that he pushed his way through the small, but rabid group of reporters, aided by the security guard posted at the exit.

As he walked away toward a



Triumph Super Fan, **Dave Sydney** poses for the TV cameras in the 4th quarter with Twin Cities leading 45-14. Sydney was more interesting than the game at that point.

a waiting car, Jones-Abboud yelled out: “So you are denying it Coach Williams? Are you denying that your opponent couldn’t communicate through his headset at crucial moments in the game?”

Williams blasted a final “No Comment!” as he got into the car. It was a natural, if unfortunate, expression, being so commonly used when dealing with the Press to evade an inquiry. And this was pointed out in the rather inflammatory article that appeared in ‘Deathspun’ later that evening. ‘COACH WILLIAMS AVOIDS QUESTIONS ABOUT HEADSETGATE’ read the headline, with a sub-headline beneath it that stated: ‘FORMER HIGH SCHOOL SWEETHEART SAYS GUY LOVED RED SOLO CUP SONG.’

The headset flap had officially turned into a “gate,” which meant a scandal of the type that could bring real sanctions down on a team or an individual if it were proven to be true. But the fact was that there was absolutely no proof that anybody associated with the Triumph had done anything to tamper with the Hawks’ radio communications during the game. Further, the teeted claims of a half dozen players and media quotes of “anonymous sources” hinting at a high tech conspiracy at Wilhalla Stadium had not been corroborated by any hard evidence. In fact, what scant hard evidence had emerged in the short time since the controversy had broke tended to exonerate the Triumph from nefarious wrongdoing.

Buried in an article that appeared the next morning in the *StarTribune*, the main Minneapolis daily was a statement from an engineer who had worked on the stadium. He claimed that the metal that composed the frames for the glass enclosure around the stadium could act like antennae and that a type of material used to infuse the thick glass over the owner’s luxury box could act as a parabolic reflector to bounce radio signals toward the field. He did not know if this was what was happening, but theoretically it was possible. Of course, the mainstream media almost completely ignored this piece of information. ESPN, the one major outlet that mentioned the quote, did so the in the context of “Triumph officials” being in “full damage control mode.”

Shockingly, the only major media figure who weighed in with something resembling common sense was **Cowan Bullherd** on his syndicated radio show, *Morning Bull*. Here is an excerpt from the transcript:

“All this chatter about the radio headsets not functioning properly at Wilhalla Stadium is just noise – blathering, inane, irritating noise,” he snapped. “It is meant to distract you from the *reality* that the game, the *main event* on Conference Finals Sunday, was *crap*! It was worse than crap actually – crap, distributed properly in your garden, can actually do some good! This game did nobody any good, except for Triumph fans. They can now rest assured that their team is indeed the best team in their Conference, probably in the entire league. The headset didn’t force that fumble by Jerome Felton. The radio didn’t whiff on Antonio Brown as he speeded through the entire Hawks special team unit for that long punt return touchdown. Static didn’t miss containment on Shane Vereen when he went on that 38-yard gallop in the third quarter! No, the Hawks made all those mistakes. Look people, you can look for excuses for why the Triumph are 18-0 and your team isn’t....if it makes you feel better. But you’re kidding yourself if you think that, *even if it were true* – and it’s NOT! – it would matter anyway! The Triumph are still better than your guys – at least this year.”

And there was a lot more than that. It was a rant for the ages and, frankly, the first one of his I have ever enjoyed listening to because it pretty much mirrored my thoughts on the topic.

But common sense seems to have taken a back seat to media hysteria in this case. The now highly alarmed football establishment feels pressure to bring closure to this out-of-control rumour. The EFL has just announced (as this goes to print) that it

will hire a special investigator to look into claims of radio tampering in Twin Cities.

Stay tuned for more vacuous drivel from the fourth estate!

WATT HAPPENED TO THE MUSTANGS

Far more shocking than the overblown controversy in Twin Cities was the fate of the Aurora Mustangs in the early Sunday game. The prime time spot had gone to Twin Cities, but the game that the entire football world tuned in to see was the showdown between the two best teams in the Atlantic Conference.

This contest was billed as a battle between the no.1 ranked offence of Sebastian and the no.1 ranked defence of the Mustangs (by measure of yards and points allowed). The poster children for both sides were, respectively, **Odell Beckham Jr.** and **JJ Watt**. The bulk of the pre-game analysis centered on this competitive dynamic, with only passing references to **Matt Ryan** and his prospects of success in attacking the “Swordfish Defence” – a near anonymous entity to most mainstream commentators.

The actual game turned the pre-game analysis on its head. The Mustangs’ defence edged out the vaunted Swordfish offence in that all important battle of number ones, but the Mustangs still lost the game. And it wasn’t even close.

The key to the Swordfish victory turned out to be that previously anonymous defence. It had been a big play defence that day; deflecting passes, pressuring the quarterback, forcing fumbles, and making interceptions at key moments. It had worked together as a team to bring down a pretty good offence, yet individuals had stood out at different moments:

Delvin Breaux made a crucial interception deep in Mustangs’ territory that had set up a field goal. **Sharrif Floyd** forced the fumble that had led to the second TD for the Swordfish. **Chandler Jones** forced a fumble on a sack and deflected a pass. But none had stood out more than **Carlos Dunlap**, that fiercely competitive right defensive end had managed to make a pro bowl left tackle look pretty ordinary all afternoon. Dunlap blocked a field goal, forced a fumble that had led to a touchdown, and harassed Ryan all day. In essence, he looked like **JJ Watt** was *supposed* to have looked in the big game.

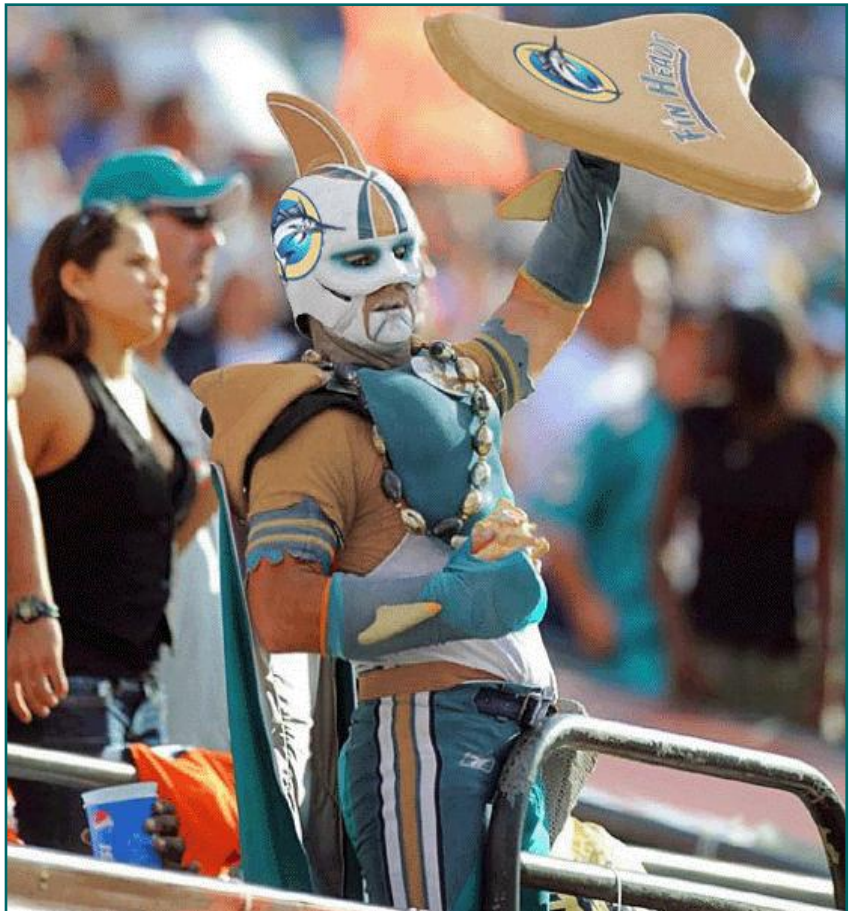
On the other hand, the pride of Aurora’s defence had not been so noticeable. He certainly hadn’t made any big plays. He hadn’t, in fact, made many plays at all – of any kind.

He almost got to **Andy Dalton** on Sebastian’s second drive of the day. But that was about all fans saw of their \$10 million man until the third quarter when he let go of **CJ Anderson** on two occasions after appearing to corral him at the line. Left tackle **Ryan Schraeder** did a fine job keeping Watt at bay most of the afternoon, with only occasional help from left guard **Justin Pugh**.

After the game there had been immediate recrimination in the bitterly disappointed Aurora media directed at nearly every player on the team save for **Patrick Peterson** and **Josh Norman**; who everyone agreed had done an outstanding job against the dangerous Beckham and Baldwin. But no player was singled out for greater criticism than Watt. While Ryan had been terrible in the clutch, his opposite number on the Fish had also been pretty lacklustre; Dalton had outplayed Ryan, but not by much. On the other hand, JJ’s counterpart on the Sebastian defence had shined like a big time star.

The question of what was wrong with Watt dominated the talk shows and the blogs and was even touched on in a more mainstream forum by **James Duthie** when he made an appearance as a guest on *Sports Central*. In response to a question from **Chris Hortenson** about what had happened to the Mustangs, Duthie replied:

“Exactly! Watt happened to the Mustangs, Kris,” he replied with a wry smile, evidently pleased with his pun. “I think people in Aurora expected that we would be talking about JJ the way we’re talking about Carlos Dunlap today. Now, that might not seem fair to some, considering all that JJ has contributed to the success of the franchise over the years, but then again people expect players like



This anonymous Swordfish fan, who calls himself **Captain Nemo** and claims to be from Atlantis, raises his ‘Rally Shield.’ Winning has attracted quite an interesting new type of crowd to the Fish Tank.

Watt, who is on the MVP ballot, to come up big in these big games. I think there is some disappointment, yes.”

Duthie was being diplomatic. The talk shows were not so kind. Aurora fans reacted with rancor. They were not used to losing and definitely not accustomed to being on the receiving end of a firm kick in the a\$\$\$. Their wounds still bleeding, they raved about the need to trade Watt “while he was still worth something.” Some caustically suggested that the Mustangs’ bio-engineering technology was falling behind that of the Swordfish.

Mustangs coach, **Rich Liotta**, mounted a token defence of Watt when bombarded with questions about whether or not he had been injured during the game. “No, JJ was good to go,” he said laconically. “I thought he played well given what they were doing on offence. They didn’t look eager to run in his direction, that’s for sure.”

It is true that the Fish ran more than they passed and when they ran it was mostly to the right side, away from Watt. But when they did stray into Watt Country they gained 46 yards in 5 tries, for an average of 9.2 yards per carry. The isolation of Watt on *Total 22* is not very flattering, nor was the *Pro Football Focal Point* consolidated game rating of **-0.3**. Of course, Liotta would not have had the benefit of film or statistics during his rather short and terse post-game presser.

No, what happened to Watt was simple: he played down to the level of most of his teammates on this day. The Mustangs were quite simply beaten in their own minds before the game even began. They had no “Mojo.” This was obvious to me very early.

In a battle of two aggressive offences it was the Mustangs who blinked first. After stopping the Swordfish on their opening possession, Aurora came back with 6 straight pass plays. One of them – a 55-yard catch-and-run by tight end **Crockett Gillmore** – jetted them deep into Sebastian territory. Things were looking good for Aurora. But a 3rd & 10 check-down to Drake came up one *foot* short of the first down at the Swordfish 13 yard line. Against most teams, this would have been an almost automatic 4th down attempt for the Mustangs. But on this day, Liotta must have figured that a sure three-point icebreaker would bode well for his team. He was promptly punished by the Football Gods for his rare timidity. **Mason Crosby** missed the easy 31-yard try.

Meanwhile, Sebastian’s **Russ Lemmon** let the football world know early that he wasn’t backing down from being the crazy Fourth Down Frontiersman that he is just because his team was facing the always awesome Mustangs. He kept his offence on the field for a 4th & 1 at his team’s 30 yard line in the first quarter of a scoreless game. They made it. And he did it again four plays later on 4th & inches from his 43. They made it. Lemmon was rewarded for his boldness with the 33-yard TD pass to Baldwin mentioned earlier.

All dynasties eventually fall into decline and fade away while others rise to take their place. Often they will meet each other on the way to their destinations – one climbing, the other descending. For a brief moment when they meet, however, they stand as equals. It is at that moment when uncertainty sets in for the observer. Will the dynasty in decline use the momentum from the descent from the high ground to knock back the challenger? Will the memory of its glorious heyday embolden it enough and intimidate the challenger sufficiently to temporarily defy the course of nature?

It was this uncertainty as well as the human tendency to see what came before as inevitable again that led many analysts and fans to discount the challenge posed by the Swordfish, a team with a history of failure. But the Mustangs themselves knew better. They played like they knew the gig was up. The Swordfish played like they were hungry – ravenous even. Time will tell if they too can stand at the top of the hill as long and as resolutely as the Mustangs did.

MVP SEARCH

Now is that time when members of the Affiliated Press (AP) must consider who the two best players were during the past regular season. The approved ballot is out with simply the names, the team, and the position played. Not much to go on if you slept through the season. But as a public service to my colleagues and those watching at home, I offer you my take on this year’s best:

In addition to the usual raft of quarterbacks, three wide receivers made the cut for the offensive MVP ballot:

Antonio Brown (TCT) – The new record holder for TD receptions (31) and 1st down receptions (105) poses a challenge to those who believe that an offence starts and ends with the quarterback. No question Brown had a good one throwing him the ball, but neither is there a question that Brown got open – *a lot*. As one of just 3 wide receivers on the roster, he *had* to. No receiver garnered more attention from opposing defences than Brown and no receiver caught as many passes (120). And he ran back punts for TDs too!

Carson Palmer (TCT) – On the flip side of the Brown argument is the contention that his receiving feats would not be possible without a quarterback deft at finding him in double-coverage. Palmer led all passers with 52 TD passes (21 to players other than Antonio Brown), yards (4,707) and finished 2nd in passer rating (111.9). And he stayed mostly upright behind a dodgy offensive line.

Russell Wilson (ICC) – Wilson made those around him better. He had to; there wasn’t much around him. In addition to finishing 4th overall in passer rating (105.9) and 3rd in TD passes (33), he rushed for 558 yards (140 less than his starting RB) and 4 TDs.

Doug Martin (TCT) – The rushing title winner (1,665 yards) toiled without much fanfare on a team known for its passing. He also led the league in 1st downs (101), gains of 10+ yards (61) and finished no.2 in TDs (13). If you are a ground ‘n pound guy, he’s your guy.

Doug Baldwin (SEB) – His numbers were impressive: 2nd in receiving yards (1,592); 2nd in TDs (16); 2nd in RAC (632); 5th in average (19.2); and 11th in receptions (83). But the most impressive thing he did was make Jameis Winston look good when Beckham was hurt.

BEST OF THE REST: Teddy Bridgewater of LA revived the fortunes of his franchise with a 101 QB rating, 28 TDs passes and a league best 0.6 INT %. **Jonathan Stewart** was one of the driving forces behind the no.3 ranked Hawks’ offence, rushing for 1,395 yards, 11 TDs and a league-leading 6.2 yard average. Gwinnett’s **Jeremy Maclin** was a constant presence on an injury-plagued offence, finishing with 101 receptions (4th), 1,554 yards (3rd), 16 TDs (T-2nd) to spark a startlingly strong Glads’ playoff run. Fans in Markham watched

ruefully as Alex Smith discovered in Brooklin that he could throw deep. He helped overcome a dreadful defence with his 33 TD passes (T-3rd), 3,669 passing yards and 498 rushing yards. For those who believe real football is played on the line, guard **Marshall Yanda** of Sebastian was unquestionably the best all-around lineman, paving the way for 36 big runs and allowing zero (0) sacks!

On the defensive side, we have some great candidates to choose from:

Von Miller (YOR) – The league leader in sacks (19) was the undisputed star of an Excalibur defence that held its own against tough competition. Opponents avoided his area of the field but he still notched 75 tackles, 6 stuffs and 4 forced fumbles.

Carlos Dunlap (SEB) – One of a pair of deadly Fish edge rushers, Dunlap emerged as one of the league's bona fide superstars over the course of a banner campaign for his team. He finished 2nd in sacks (17), 3rd in hurries (22) and racked up 51 tackles and 6 run stuffs.

Chandler Jones (SEB) – The second one in the Fish edge rusher set also specialized in bagging quarterbacks (17) and was good at harassing them too (17 Hurries). He was a dangerous tackler, with 6 stuffs and 4 forced fumbles.

JJ Watt (AUR) – It was another year of dominating the line of scrimmage for the Aurora superstar. Despite being treated as a 'no-go zone,' he finished tied for 9th in sacks (13) and added 15 Hurries, 51 Tackles, 2 Forced Fumbles and an incredible 12 Pass Deflections.

Khalil Mack (MVM) – The one steady bright spot in a dreary Monarchs season did it all: 15 sacks (T-5th); 11 run stuffs (T-16th); 5 Forced Fumbles (T-5th), 14 Hurries and a whopping 84 Tackles. But his superhuman efforts were not enough to lift his sad team.

BEST OF THE REST: **Fletcher Cox** was a stuff machine for the Cubs, finishing with a league-leading 20 while pressuring the QB 24 times and notching 67 tackles to stand out on a star-studded Cubs' D-line. **Aaron Donald** of Mohave was the league's most effective interior pass rusher with 15 sacks and 23 Hurries while staying at home to defend the run with 36 tackles and 8 stuffs. **Marcus Peters** stood out on a horrible Blue Eagles defence with a league-leading 7 interceptions, 2 pick-sixes, 16 deflections (5th) and a 48% pass completion against. If one had to choose one of Aurora's elite corners, **Patrick Peterson** would be the man; he allowed just 39% of passes to be completed against him while deflecting 18 passes (2nd) and snagging 4 interceptions. Last but not least, **Ezekiel "Ziggy" Ansah** was the biggest part of a league-leading pass rush in Twin Cities, finishing with 16 sacks (4th), 15 Hurries and a league-leading 8 Forced Fumbles. He also tracked down 73 ball-carriers and registered 6 run stuffs.

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JIMMY'S CHAMPIONSHIP PICK

At 'Fawcett Stadium' in Canton, Ohio

TWIN CITIES @ SEBASTIAN (line – TRIUMPH by 1)

INJURIES: Twin Cities – None; Sebastian – None.

BACKGROUND: Both teams entered the league in 2012 as part of the EFL's second expansion and faced each other in their historic first ever regular season game. Twin Cities won that contest by the lop-sided score of 31-6 and have dominated the all-time series since, having won all four match-ups over their first four seasons. This will be their first meeting of 2016. The Triumph have made the playoffs twice before, losing in the quarter finals both times, while the Swordfish have never made the post-season until this year. This is the first trip to the Gale Sayers Game for both teams.

WHEN SEBASTIAN HAS THE BALL: There is nothing that the Swordfish offence cannot do to an opponent so Russ Lemmon has room to be more creative than most against the no.1 ranked Triumph defence. Typically, the Swordfish run an alternating two-back system, with CJ Anderson getting most of the prime time action and Justin Forsett filling an active supporting role. This keeps both backs fresh and capable of breaking long runs at virtually any time. They prefer to run to the strong side behind right tackle Morgan Moses, with Marshall Yanda pulling from right guard, making their ground game one of the most difficult to stop. These tactics are unlikely to change but don't rule out the possibility that both running backs will see a little more action against a Triumph defence that has not been overly robust at stopping the run (despite their 5-2 base defence) but finished second in the league in defending the pass

and best overall in passing yards per game allowed. With Chris Harris Jr. and Darius Slay opposing the dynamic duo of Odell Beckham Jr. and Doug Baldwin, and the Triumph pass rush leading the league in sacks, Andy Dalton will want to unload the ball quickly underneath, in conjunction with a strong running game, to tighten up the coverage and keep the front seven honest before he tries to unload the ball deep. Benjamin Watson and potentially even fullback Clive Walford could see more action in the passing game than they are accustomed to seeing. But while the Swordfish are likely to make some adjustments to account for the strengths of the Triumph, do not expect them to stray far from what got them here. At some point they will challenge the Triumph corners and defy the pass rush prowess of Ziggy Ansah; and they may even do it on 4th down in their own end early in the game.

WHEN TWIN CITIES HAS THE BALL: It is no secret that the principal weapon of the Triumph offence is wide receiver Antonio Brown. For most of the regular season opponents declined to focus all of their attention on Brown, to their detriment. Recently teams have made a concerted effort to contain Brown. That has allowed other capable players, like Shane Vereen, Rishard Matthews and Charles Clay, to get noticed along with rushing title leader Doug Martin – who has always been a relatively unsung but vital force in the Triumph attack – while not completely shutting down the Triumph star. Carson Palmer keeps it all together behind one of the more dubious offensive lines in the league. The Triumph are potentially vulnerable to a good pass rush. The screen pass to Vereen, their common antidote to aggressive blitzing, will not be as effective against a Swordfish pass rush that generates almost all of its force from twin killers Carlos Dunlap and Chandler Jones. The pair combined for 34 sacks on the year, more sacks than 11 teams had this year. The Swordfish strategy on defence begins with them; their play will be the key to their success, or lack thereof, against a Triumph attack that finished only behind Sebastian in efficiency and was no.1 in points scored. The Triumph will employ one of two approaches, depending on how the Swordfish address the problem of Brown. If Sebastian chooses to double cover Brown at all costs, expect to see a lot of the two-tight end set and a heavy dose of Doug Martin, Tyler Eifert and Charles Clay. If the Fish take their chances and try to limit Martin or play it straight and count on their playmakers, expect to see a lot of Brown and sweeps and pitches to Martin to challenge the Sebastian linebackers.

THE WAY I SEE IT: The Triumph may be one of the best coached teams in the league. As good as they are, they would not be perfect heading into the Championship game if not for extremely savvy use of their assets. This has maximized their potential and created some good fortune along the way. But as fantastic as Antonio Brown, Doug Martin and Carson Palmer have been, their offence has cleverly concealed gaps, notably the offensive line and a lack of depth at wide receiver. These gaps can be exposed by the type of defence that the Swordfish bring. A repeat of the type of performances that both Carlos Dunlap and Chandler Jones had in the Conference Championship game could spell big trouble for Carson Palmer, who has shown a tendency in his weaker moments to throw the ball to the wrong jersey. On the other side, the highly weaponized Swordfish offence will be the toughest challenge yet for the Triumph defence. They must generate pressure on Andy Dalton if they hope to contain the deep threat posed by Beckham and Baldwin. Yet they cannot ignore CJ Anderson, who is capable of ripping off a game-changing run from any spot on the field. With so many options, Russ Lemmon's offence could be the first to fly high against the Triumph defence. But if he attempts the wrong gamble at the wrong time, it could just as easily fly into the side of a mountain. This one is shaping up to be one of the most exciting championship games yet and is almost too close to call. But in the end I think the real power lies in Sebastian. I expect the game to be one for the ages, but one in which the power ultimately prevails. **PICK: SEBASTIAN**



ANCIENT HISTORY CHANNEL PRESENTS *This Week in EFL History* With Professor *Sterling Smitherman*

FROM THE EFL ARCHIVES – For discriminating football fans across the continent, the Conference Finals of the 2010 EFL Season signalled the beginning of the “real season.” The sham that had been Quarter Finals was mercifully in the past and all eyes turned to the Big Four: Florida vs. Pickering and Charleswood vs. Chino.

These were expected to be close contests. Classic status was not out of the question. It was also widely believed that the winner of the Can-Am Conference Final would be the eventual Gale Sayers Trophy winner. Not that

the Patriots and Convicts were not quality finalists; only that the Dragons and Spartans appeared to be in another league – a kind of “Super” EFL division all their own.

In the regular Conference Final, the Pats’ **Adrian Peterson** got his revenge for a Week 10 debacle in which the Convicts had held him to just 3 yards rushing on 8 carries, with an 80-yard, 2 TD display in a slow, crushing 20-3 steamroll over the Convicts. Yes, it was boring unless you were the type of Pats fan who hated **Donovan McNabb** and enjoyed watching him struggle. The Convict QB finished with 2 INTs and a 26 QB rating.

In the main attraction, the Spartans shocked the football world – not by beating the Dragons, but by crushing them 28-9 and depriving them of a perfect season. The game was never close. Pickering scored on the opening drive (a first against the Dragons in 2010) and it went downhill from there for the two-time Champs. **Morgan Burnett** intercepted **Aaron Rodgers** of the ensuing drive and returned it to the 6, setting up a **Chris Johnson** TD run on the next play. Then a 31-yard sweep by Johnson helped set up a 9-yard TD pass from **Brett Favre** to **Percy Harvin**. It was 21-0 at half time and the writing was on the wall.

The post-game Championship line was Pickering (-6).