

2017



CONFERENCE



EFL

ELITE FOOTBALL LEAGUE

In our 1st season and still going strong!

February 26, 2018

2017



FINALS



EAST



CENTRAL



WEST



NORTH



COASTAL

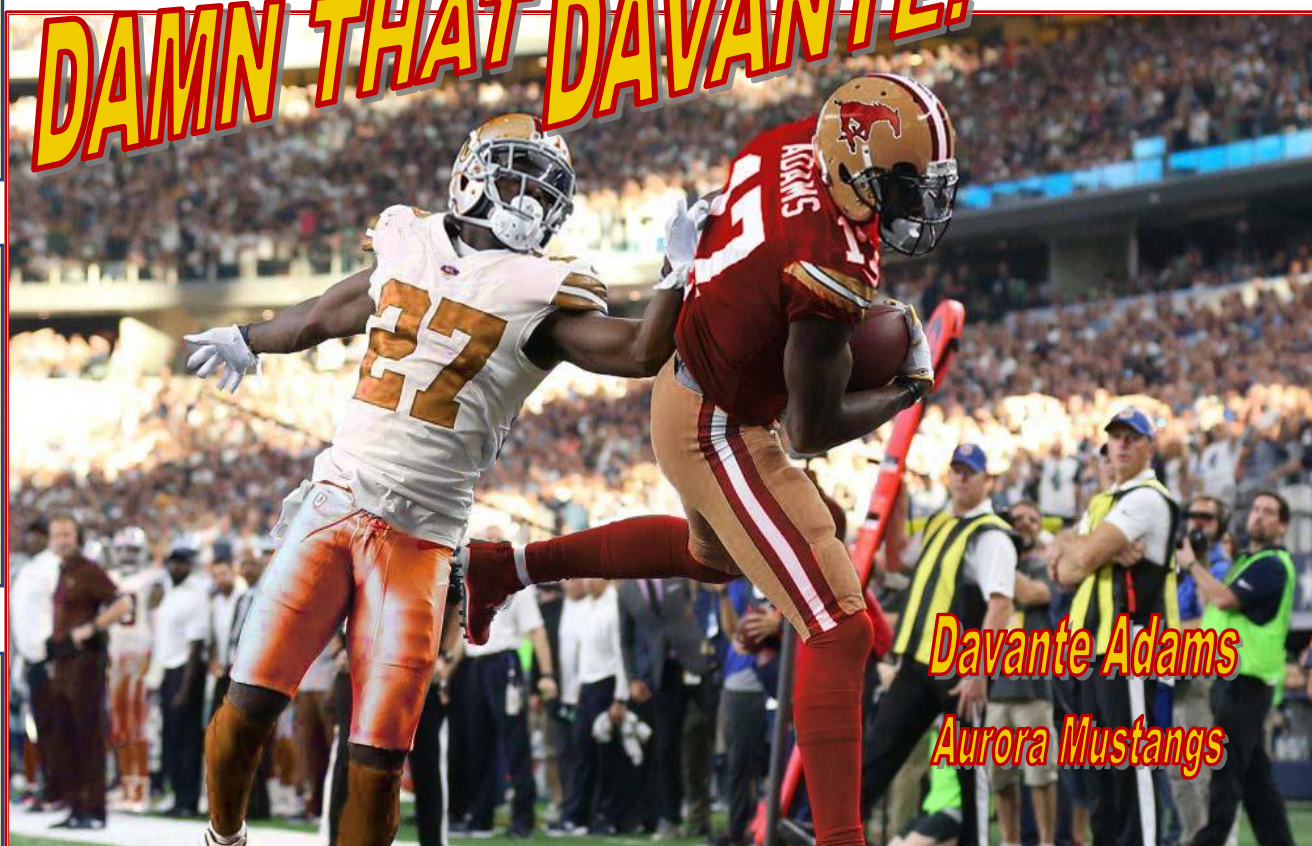


SOUTH



	IOWA CITY CUBS	33			BUDAPEST NORTH STARS	6
	BRUXELLES BOMBERS	44			AURORA MUSTANGS	35

DAMN THAT DAVANTE!



Davante Adams
Aurora Mustangs

Davante Adams jumps across the goal line after coming down with a pass from **Matt Ryan** behind back-up CB, **Quincy Wilson** for a 10-yard score in 2nd quarter action in Aurora. It was the second of 2 TD catches on the day for Adams, who helped lead the Mustangs to lop-sided 35-6 humbling of the North Stars in the Atlantic Conference Championship.



*Who was slick in
the Conference
Finals?*

**"Brylcreem" THE
EFL'S FIRST SPONSOR**



Matt Ryan
QB
Aurora
Mustangs

17 of 26, 216 yards, 4 TDs. Made the most of his team's opportunities.



Josh Shaw
CB
Bruxelles
Bombers

8 T, 1 FF, 1 INT, 2 of 7 Pass Def. 2 turnovers set up 2 Bomber TDs.



33

Iowa City

ELITE FOOTBALL LEAGUE

GAME CENTER

2017

Pacific Conference Final



44

Bruxelles

TEAM LEADERS

Passing	Cmp	Att	Yds	TD
Wilson	15	32	208	2
Rushing	Car	Yds	Avg	TD
Mixon	11	67	6.1	0
Receiving	Rec	Yds	Avg	TD
Wallace	6	132	22.0	1

Team

Iowa City

1

2

3

4

OT

Total

7

3

7

16

0

33

Bruxelles

10

21

10

3

0

44

Play of the Game

In the 1st quarter, 1st & 10 at the Cubs' 42-yard line, **Marcus Mariota**, under pressure from **Fletcher Cox**, threw a strike on the run to **Travis Kelce**, who went all the way for the TD.

TEAM LEADERS

Passing	Cmp	Att	Yds	TD
Mariota	14	20	179	2
Rushing	Car	Yds	Avg	TD
Fournette	20	117	5.9	2
Receiving	Rec	Yds	Avg	TD
Kelce	7	122	17.4	2

CUBS TURN GAME OVER TO BOMBERS!

3 CUBS' TURNOVERS LEAD TO 3 TDs IN 1ST HALF BRUXELLES BLITZ

SUMMARY: The Cubs received the opening kickoff but were soon punting after a three-and-out. The Bombers took over at their own 30 and drove 58 yards in 11 plays, aided by a 22-yard pass interference penalty on Cubs' corner **Casey Hayward**, to open the scoring with a 30-yard field goal from **Chandler Catanzaro**. On the first play of the Cubs' next series, Bomber lineman **Frank Clark** stripped the ball from **Russell Wilson** and Bruxelles recovered at the 22. Back-to-back completions of 12 and 10 yards from **Marcus Mariota** to **Travis Kelce** put the Bombers in the end zone for a 10-0 lead. An 18-yard run by **Joe Mixon** jump-started the Iowa response and a 7-yard run by **CJ Prosise** finished it off as they drove 75 yards in 10 plays to pull within a field goal. The teams exchanged punts to finish off the 1st quarter and the Bombers took over at their 21 to start the 2nd. Scrambles of 10 and 14 yards by Mariota helped put the Bombers in position to strike, with Mariota firing a long slant to Kelce for a 42-yard touchdown pass. On the ensuing kickoff, quarter-final hero **Marqise Lee** attempted to make something happen with a return from 5-yards deep in the end zone. But **Josh Shaw** punched the ball out and **Tashaun Gipson** covered it up to give Bruxelles another shot from deep in Cubs' territory at the 18-yard line. It took one **Leonard Fournette** run, a trap-play to the left, to cash in for a TD on the Cub's second turnover and suddenly it was 24-7 Bombers. On Iowa City's next series Shaw struck once more, intercepting a dump-off from Wilson at the Cubs' 33. This time back-up running back **Chris Thompson** provided the juice, breaking an 18-yard run on 3rd & 3 to set up his own TD three plays later on a 3-yard run off left tackle. The Cubs managed to salvage a 41-yard **Justin Tucker** FG before half time, but still trailed by 3 TDs, 31-10. In the 3rd quarter, a desperate attempt by the Cubs on 4th & 3 at their own 27 backfired, setting up a 3-play TD drive that Fournette finished with a 7-yard dive across the goal line to make it 41-10 Bruxelles with time winding down in the 3rd. The Cubs' offence finally delivered a blow with a 38-yard bomb to **Mike Wallace** setting up an 11-yard TD pass to Prosise then got on a bit of a roll with a FG and 2 TDs in the 4th quarter. But with the Bombers burning up time on the ground, the effort was too little, too late.

QUOTES: "I feel bad for our great fans who hoped this was our year but I have to tell you I am proud as punch of my players. Even when they were down 31 points late in the 3rd they were loose on the sideline and just wanted to keep playing. They never gave up!" – Cubs' coach, **Deron Redding**
 "We got the breaks today and were able to capitalize on them against a very good team. The offence is producing and our defence continues to make big plays. That's where we need to be if we intend to finish this thing off against the Mustangs." – Bruxelles coach, **Ken Main**.



ANGRY FAN



titter

HAPPY FAN



Archibald Thacker @ArchieDMR
 Poor preparation resulting in total embarrassment once again. Nothing will be done of course. @DRed will continue to act like nothing's wrong.

Faart van Wijnendaele FVW@BrusselsTimes
 There is something intrinsically Flemish about these Bombers and the way they challenge the EFL establishment by refusing to lie down.



Iowa City 33 Bruxelles 44

	1	2	3	4	F
Iowa City	7	3	7	16	33
Bruxelles	10	21	10	3	44



Complete

* Playoff * 03-05-2018 The Fortress Temp:77 Wind:

No Line MVP:Kelce

HF

1	7:53	Bruxelles	FG	Catanzaro 30 (11-58-5:57)	0-3
1	6:53	Bruxelles	TD	Mariota 10 pass to Kelce (Catanzaro) (2-22-0:55)	0-10
1	1:55	Iowa City	TD	Prosise 7 run (Tucker) (10-75-4:58)	7-10
2	11:23	Bruxelles	TD	Mariota 43 pass to Kelce (Catanzaro) (6-79-2:41)	7-17
2	11:05	Bruxelles	TD	Fournette 18 run (Catanzaro) (1-18-0:10)	7-24
2	1:50	Bruxelles	TD	Thompson 3 run (Catanzaro) (10-67-5:54)	7-31
2	0:00	Iowa City	FG	Tucker 41 (8-38-1:44)	10-31
3	8:36	Bruxelles	FG	Catanzaro 53 (6-53-3:33)	10-34
3	5:39	Bruxelles	TD	Fournette 7 run (Catanzaro) (3-27-1:49)	10-41
3	2:45	Iowa City	TD	Wilson 11 pass to Prosise (Tucker) (8-75-2:54)	17-41
4	11:30	Bruxelles	FG	Catanzaro 35 (12-58-6:12)	17-44
4	8:19	Iowa City	FG	Tucker 38 (8-51-3:00)	20-44
4	4:58	Iowa City	TD	Austin 9 run (2 - failed) (4-26-1:00)	26-44
4	0:27	Iowa City	TD	Wilson 20 pass to Wallace (Tucker) (8-68-1:26)	33-44

Player Stats

Passing	Att	Cmp	Yds	25	In	Td	Sk	Rate
Wilson	32	15	208	2	1	2	1	76.0
Lee,M	1	1	4	0	0	0	0	83.3
	33	16	212	2	1	2	1	76.8

Rushing	Att	Yds	Avg	FD	10	Lg	Td
Mixon	11	67	6.1	2	1	18	1
Prosise	9	65	7.2	5	3	17	1
Wilson	3	17	5.7	1	1	10	0
Austin	2	9	4.5	1	0	9	1
Conner	3	8	2.7	0	0	6	0
Lockett	1	0	0.0	0	0	0	0
	29	166	5.7	9	6	18	2

Receiving	No	Dp	Att	Yds	Avg	FD	25	Lg	Td
Wallace	6	0	11	132	22.0	6	2	38	1
Prosise	4	0	9	32	8.0	2	0	11	1
Austin	2	0	3	13	6.5	1	0	7	0
Lee,M	2	0	5	21	10.5	2	0	12	0
Lockett	1	0	2	7	7.0	0	0	7	0
Njoku	1	0	1	7	7.0	1	0	7	0
Mixon	0	0	1	0	0.0	0	0	0	0
Lee,K	0	0	1	0	0.0	0	0	0	0
	16	0	33	212	13.3	12	2	38	2

Fumbles	No	Rec	Td
Lee,M	1	0	0
Lockett	1	0	0
Wilson	1	0	0
Hargrave	0	1	0
	3	1	0

Kick Returns	No	Yds	Avg	Lg	Td
Lee,M	4	87	21.8	32	0
Mixon	1	36	36.0	36	0
McKinnon	1	13	13.0	13	0
	6	136	22.7	36	0

Punt Returns	No	Fc	Yds	Avg	Lg	Td
Lockett	2	0	20	10.0	12	0
	2	0	20	10.0	12	0

Kicking	FG	Lg	XP	Pts
Tucker	2-2	41	3-3	9

Punting	No	Yds	Avg	Tb	50	Bk	Lg
Anger	3	153	51.0	0	1	0	54

Defense	Tkl	Sk	Def	Stf	Hur	FF	Int
Ogletree	21	0	0	3	0	0	0-0
Emanuel	7	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Richardson	5	0	0	4	0	0	0-0
Watkins	4	0	1	0	0	0	0-0
Hargrave	3	1	0	0	0	0	0-0
Rhodes	3	0	2	0	0	0	0-0
Cox	3	0	0	1	2	0	0-0
Hayward	3	0	1	0	0	0	0-0
Piera-Paul	2	0	0	0	1	0	0-0
Jenkins	2	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Matakevich	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Harris	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Bouye	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Meltonwu	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
	57	1	4	8	3	0	0-0

Passing	Att	Cmp	Yds	25	In	Td	Sk	Rate
Mariota	20	14	179	1	0	2	0	131.0
Foles	1	1	22	0	0	0	1	118.8
	21	15	201	1	0	2	1	133.2

Rushing	Att	Yds	Avg	FD	10	Lg	Td
Fournette	20	117	5.9	6	2	43	2
Thompson	5	46	9.2	3	2	18	1
Mack	9	27	3.0	1	1	21	0
Mariota	5	22	4.4	3	2	14	0
Foles	2	-2	-1.0	0	0	0	0
	41	210	5.1	13	7	43	3

Receiving	No	Dp	Att	Yds	Avg	FD	25	Lg	Td
Kelce	7	0	10	122	17.4	6	1	43	2
Sanders	3	0	4	32	10.7	2	0	12	0
Thompson	3	0	4	31	10.3	1	0	19	0
Pryor Sr.	1	0	1	8	8.0	0	0	8	0
Fournette	1	0	2	8	8.0	1	0	8	0
	15	0	21	201	13.4	10	1	43	2

Fumbles	No	Rec	Td
Gipson	0	1	0
Clark	0	1	0
	0	2	0

Kick Returns	No	Yds	Avg	Lg	Td
Thompson	3	28	9.3	23	0
	3	28	9.3	23	0

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

Kicking	FG	Lg	XP	Pts
Catanzaro	3-4	53	5-5	14

Punting	No	Yds	Avg	Tb	50	Bk	Lg
McAfee	2	103	51.5	0	0	1	52

Defense	Tkl	Sk	Def	Stf	Hur	FF	Int
Shaw	8	0	0	0	0	1	1-0
Davis	7	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Dupree	6	0	0	0	1	0	0-0
Whitehead	6	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Clark	5	1	0	1	4	1	0-0
Smith,H	5	0	1	0	0	0	0-0
Burns	3	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Suggs	2	0	0	0	1	0	0-0
Walker,D	2	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Gipson	2	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Ogbah	1	0	0	0	2	0	0-0
Brothers	1	0	0	0	0	1	0-0
Gaines	1	0	1	0	0	0	0-0
Smith,P	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Moreau	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Wilkerson	0	0	0	0	1	0	0-0
	51	1	2	1	9	3	1-0



7 catches, 122 yards, 2 TDs. His 42-yard TD broke open the floodgates.

	Iowa City	Bruxelles
First Downs	21	24
Rushes	29-166	41-210
Passes	33-16-212	21-15-201
Sacked	1-3	1-7
Fumble	3	0
Penalties	2-36	2-10
Turnovers	3	0
Missed Tackles	5	5
Dropped Passes	0	0
Bad Passes	0	3
Passes 25+	2	1
Runs 10+	5	7
Blitzes	2	28
Time	23:45	36:15
Third Down	9-16	7-14
Fourth Down	0-1	0-0
Red Att/Td/Fg	5/4/1	6/4/2
Net Offense	375	404



6

Budapest

35

Aurora

TEAM LEADERS

Passing	Cmp	Att	Yds	TD
Hoyer	14	24	112	0
Rushing	Car	Yds	Avg	TD
Johnson	24	130	5.4	0
Receiving	Rec	Yds	Avg	TD
Diggs	7	53	7.6	0

Team	1	2	3	4	OT	Total
Budapest	3	3	0	0	-	6
Aurora	7	14	14	0	-	35

Play of the Game

1st Quarter, facing 1st & 10 at the Budapest 29, trailing 3-0, **Matt Ryan** threw a medium hitch to **Davante Adams**, who spun and headed up field for a 29-yard TD to begin the rout.

TEAM LEADERS

Passing	Cmp	Att	Yds	TD
Ryan	17	26	216	4
Rushing	Car	Yds	Avg	TD
Gallman	8	45	5.6	0
Receiving	Rec	Yds	Avg	TD
Adams	4	75	18.8	2

MUSTANGS CHARGE PAST NORTH STARS!

RYAN THROWS 4 TD PASSES, DAVANTE ADAMS CATCHES 2 OF THEM

SUMMARY: The North Stars survived a pair of **Brian Hoyer** fumbles on the game's opening drive to push their way into field goal range for **Kai Forbath**, who drilled a 40-yarder to give the visitors an early 3-0 lead. However, the Mustangs made it clear on their first possession that they would not settle for trading field goals. **Matt Ryan** converted a pair of 3rd-and-longs and **Mike Tolbert** drove through a run-key on 4th & 1 to keep the drive alive for some **Davante Adams** heroics on a 29-yard catch-and-run that gave the home team a 7-3 lead. The Stars went three-and-out on their next series and netted only 34 yards on the punt to set up the Mustangs near mid-field. Running backs **Danny Woodhead** and **Wayne Gallman** featured in a grinding 14-play drive where the longest play – an 11-yard cross to **Kyle Rudolph** – came on 4th & 3 at the Budapest 37. **Rashad Jennings** capped the gritty effort with a 5-yard TD run off left tackle to make it 14-3, Aurora. Running back **David Johnson** brought some life to the Budapest offence on their next drive with runs of 23 and 15 yards, but their advance was halted at the Mustangs' 9 and Forbath was called on to kick another FG to make the score 14-6. A 26-yard return by **Kenyan Drake** on an angled kickoff gave the Mustangs good field position at their 39 to start their third series. A short out to **Julian Edelman** for 13 yards, a 14-yard hitch to Rudolph and a 13-yard pass interference penalty on Budapest's **Robert Alford** were the key plays setting up Adams' second TD catch, a 10-yard dump-off from Ryan to make it 21-6 for the home team at half time. The Mustangs were set to receive the kickoff to start the 2nd half but the Stars caught them off guard with a successful onside kick. But a stop of Johnson by Aurora defensive MVP **Willie Young** on 4th & 1 gave the ball back to the home team and they wasted little time taking advantage. Four plays later Edelman was in the end zone after snaring a short cross from Ryan for a 25-yard score to make it 28-6. Johnson fumbled away the ball on the Stars' next possession, setting up another short field for Aurora. Three plays later Rudolph was over the goal line after hauling in a 21-yard cross from Ryan. The rest of the game played out with the Mustangs shifting into slow-down mode and Stars turning the ball over on downs twice trying for a major.

QUOTES: "Watching the Mustangs on film and dealing with them on the field are two different things. Five drives and five touchdowns put a lot of pressure on our offence and a lot of confidence to their defence." – Budapest coach, **Darrin Jones**.

"Our first drive set the tone for the day. We did not want to get into kicking duel with them and we were willing to gamble early in order to avoid it. Mike making that first down on 4th & 1 was one of those plays that you guys won't focus on but which coaches love." – Aurora coach, **Rich Liotta**.

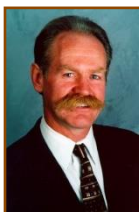


ANGRY FAN



titter

HAPPY FAN



Lanny McDonald @LannysMustache
My mustache is drooping after this loss. A sad end to a good season.



James Duthie @efljamesduthie
@M_Ryan4 is hands down the MVP this year and will erase all doubt in two weeks.



Budapest 6 Aurora 35



	1	2	3	4	F
Budapest	3	3	0	0	6
Aurora	7	14	14	0	35

Complete

* Playoff * 03-05-2018 Magna Park Temp:50 Wind:10-20 None No Line MVP:Ryan HFA:

1	8:14	Budapest	FG	Forbath 40 (13-55-6:38)	3-0
1	3:35	Aurora	TD	Ryan 29 pass to Adams (Lutz) (11-75-4:39)	3-7
2	10:52	Aurora	TD	Jennings 5 run (Lutz) (14-54-5:57)	3-14
2	4:54	Budapest	FG	Brown 27 (11-66-5:55)	6-14
2	1:00	Aurora	TD	Ryan 10 pass to Adams (Lutz) (8-61-3:48)	6-21
3	11:55	Aurora	TD	Ryan 25 pass to Edelman (Lutz) (4-52-1:07)	6-28
3	9:09	Aurora	TD	Ryan 21 pass to Rudolph (Lutz) (3-38-0:57)	6-35

Player Stats

Passing	Att	Cmp	Yds	25	In	Td	Sk	Rate
Hoyer	24	14	112	0	0	0	3	70.1
Taylor	10	5	30	0	0	0	1	56.3
	34	19	142	0	0	0	4	66.1

Rushing	Att	Yds	Avg	FD	10	Lg	Td
Johnson	24	130	5.4	5	5	23	0
Hightower	6	25	4.2	2	0	7	0
Taylor	2	25	12.5	1	1	23	0
Olawale	2	5	2.5	1	0	5	0
	34	185	5.4	9	6	23	0

Receiving	No	Dp	Att	Yds	Avg	FD	25	Lg	Td
Diggs,S	7	0	11	53	7.6	3	0	9	0
Johnson	7	0	9	39	5.6	1	0	8	0
Thomas	3	1	8	35	11.7	1	0	20	0
Marshall	2	0	5	15	7.5	1	0	8	0
Fasano	0	1	1	0	0.0	0	0	0	0
	19	2	34	142	7.5	6	0	20	0

Fumbles	No	Rec	Td
Hoyer	2	2	0
Johnson	1	0	0
	3	2	0

Kick Returns	No	Yds	Avg	Lg	Td
Tate	2	42	21.0	23	0
	2	42	21.0	23	0

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

Kicking	FG	Lg	XP	Pts
Brown	1-1	27	0-0	3
Forbath	1-1	40	0-0	3

Punting	No	Yds	Avg	Tb	20	Bk	Lg
Way	2	90	45.0	0	0	0	47

Defense	Tkl	Sk	Def	Stf	Hur	FF	Int
McKinney	6	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Campbell	5	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Iloka	4	0	1	0	0	0	0-0
Scandrick	4	0	1	0	0	0	0-0
Liuget	3	0	0	0	1	0	0-0
David	3	0	1	0	0	0	0-0
Jordan	2	0	1	0	1	0	0-0
Jack	2	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Alford	2	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Jackson	2	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Cyprien	2	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Howard	1	0	0	0	1	0	0-0
Smith	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Sherels	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Dent	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Reed,B	0	0	0	0	1	0	0-0
	39	0	4	0	4	0	0-0

Passing	Att	Cmp	Yds	25	In	Td	Sk	Rate
Ryan	26	17	216	2	0	4	0	130.8
	26	17	216	2	0	4	0	130.8

Rushing	Att	Yds	Avg	FD	10	Lg	Td
Gallman	8	45	5.6	2	1	12	0
Woodhead	8	35	4.4	2	1	13	0
Jennings	7	16	2.3	2	0	5	1
Tolbert	1	4	4.0	1	0	4	0
	24	100	4.2	7	2	13	1

Receiving	No	Dp	Att	Yds	Avg	FD	25	Lg	Td
Rudolph	4	0	4	57	14.3	4	0	21	1
Edelman	4	0	8	64	16.0	3	1	25	1
Adams	4	0	6	75	18.8	4	1	29	2
Woodhead	2	1	4	12	6.0	0	0	7	0
Miller	2	1	3	11	5.5	1	0	7	0
Jennings	1	0	1	-3	-3.0	0	0	0	0
	17	2	26	216	12.7	12	2	29	4

Fumbles	No	Rec	Td
Peterson	0	1	0
	0	1	0

Kick Returns	No	Yds	Avg	Lg	Td
Drake	1	26	26.0	26	0
	1	26	26.0	26	0

Punt Returns	No	Fc	Yds	Avg	Lg	Td
Edelman	2	0	9	4.5	5	0
	2	0	9	4.5	5	0

Kicking	FG	Lg	XP	Pts
Lutz	0-0	0	5-5	5

Punting	No	Yds	Avg	Tb	20	Bk	Lg
Koch	2	65	32.5	0	1	0	33

Defense	Tkl	Sk	Def	Stf	Hur	FF	Int
Orr	10	0	1	0	0	0	0-0
Thompson,S	8	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Norman	6	0	0	0	0	1	0-0
Young	5	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Bowman	4	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Thomas,M	4	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Robison	3	2	0	0	1	1	0-0
Avril	3	1	0	0	1	0	0-0
Swearinger	3	0	2	0	0	0	0-0
Peterson	3	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Reddick	3	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Jackson	2	1	0	0	0	1	0-0
Wilson,H	2	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Watt	2	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Dansby	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Autry	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Thomas,E	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
	61	4	3	0	2	3	0-0



A relatively quiet day for pass yards, 216, but 4 TD passes carried the day.

	Budapest	Aurora
First Downs	18	21
Rushes	34-185	24-100
Passes	34-19-142	26-17-216
Sacked	4-41	0-0
Fumble	3	0
Penalties	8-58	4-25
Turnovers	1	0
Missed Tackles	5	8
Dropped Passes	2	2
Bad Passes	4	0
Passes 25+	0	2
Runs 10+	6	2
Blitzes	9	5
Time	34:44	25:16
Third Down	7-17	5-9
Fourth Down	3-6	2-2
Red Att/Td/Fg	4/0/2	2/2/0
Net Offense	286	316



AROUND THE



With Spats McChad

NEW YORK – In wake of the two Conference Final flops this weekend some of the mass media intelligentsia are breaking ranks with the EFL company line and are being openly critical of the Atlantic Ocean commute required for games whenever the European teams are involved. Yes, even **Peter Prince** voiced mild disapproval, in the weaselly form of suggestive questions tacked on to his usual banal analysis:

“The Cubs ran into Marcus Mariota and his chosen target, Travis Kelce, this week. Mariota has to be considered one of the league’s elite quarterbacks, alongside Matt Ryan and Russell Wilson,” Prince begins in his North America Today article, ‘A Flight Too Far.’ *“The Cubs have a very good defence, but Mariota was able to get around it using that play-making ability of his. His performance removed all doubt that he and his team and for real this year. But what might have been the outcome if his opposite number, Russell Wilson, had hosted him in Iowa City? What are the affects of an 11-hour flight, into a time zone 6-hours ahead of our own, on the finely-tuned body and mind of a football player? We can never know for sure. The historical record will simply show that Bruxelles was the better team in 2017.”*

Prince goes on to apologize for Wilson’s uninspiring performance while casting upon Mariota and the Bombers the very doubt he had earlier claimed had been dispelled by their victory.

Prince clearly believes that Mariota comes after Wilson in the EFL pecking order and that the Bombers’ victory was somehow an upending of the natural order of things. His unsubtle inference that the wear of inter-continental travel had a role to play in this upset is partly an excuse to explain his confident pre-game prediction of a Cubs win; but it is also a quiet indictment of at least the league’s playoff format, if not the European expansion itself. Even the EFL becomes a target when Prince’s ego is involved.

On the other end of the trans-Atlantic commute controversy there was the flat-as-a-pancake performance of Budapest in Aurora this week. Given Aurora’s season-long dominance against virtually the entire league, the protest of time-zone interference rings hollow, however. That did not stop **Skope Boylezz**, a mainstream mouthpiece with an historical bias in favour of **Darrin Jones’** North Stars, from weighing in with more grating and controversial commentary on EFL Playoff Round Table.

“The league has to consider neutral field for all playoff games involving the European teams,” Boylezz asserted. “We did not see the same North Stars team we are accustomed to seeing in the playoffs. This was a team that looked like it needed a nap from the start. They looked dozy...completely out of it, and we all know the reason why!”

When asked by the more even-handed **Kris Hortenson** where the neutral field should be, Boylezz prevaricated, obviously having not thought through his point beyond the opening line: “That’s not the point, Kris! The point is that we have a playoff game – and not just any playoff game, a *conference championship* game – where one team has a huge advantage over the other based only on where they are based! The league has to rectify that for next year or fans are going to tune out!”

While my mainstream colleagues generate controversy, possibly in a coordinated effort to generate new interest and overshadow the fact that EFL ratings were again down this week – starting off low and falling beneath *Sunday Night with Megyn Kelly* by the 11:55 mark of the 3rd quarter in Aurora – I am simply going to point out the obvious: the better teams won, just like last year when the superior Triumph torched the Hawks and the surging Swordfish skewered the Mustangs. There was no home field controversy then, so why drag out the trans-Atlantic travel as the defining reason now?

I am not saying that the Atlantic travel had *no effect whatsoever* – particularly in the case of the Cubs, which I will explain in the next segment – but it is obvious to me that, like last year, the cumulative experience of the season pointed to this being the likely finish. The Cubs struggled against good teams outside their division all year. The Mustangs didn’t lose a game. These final outcomes were very likely going to happen, regardless.

GOOD TRY

Since the “lost season” of 2012 (also known as the “Dark Season,” after the black & yellow ‘Hawkeye’-style uniforms they wore for that year only) the Cubs have made the post-season three times but have not reached the final on those occasions. While making the playoffs three out of four seasons (and coming very close the other) is usually a sign that a franchise is on the right track, the team’s failure to live up to high expectations has created a sort of schizophrenia in Cubs’ home media, one somewhat reflective of the team’s on-field performances.

The battle between the ‘Thackerites’ and ‘McGillicuddyists’ plays out in print, on video and on the airwaves through

the State of Iowa during the season and whenever a significant football event occurs. It is no exaggeration to declare that it is a battle for the team's very soul.

The 'Thackerites' – a vocal minority – tend to mimic the views and assume the critical tone of **Archibald Thacker** of the *Des Moines Register*, a Cubs sports columnist who rose to prominence during the disastrous 1-15 campaign of 2012. Thacker alienated Iowa coach and GM **Deron Redding** with suggestions that he was deliberately tanking in order to obtain a high draft pick and that, in the process, was starting a "losing culture" for the franchise, one that had been moderately successful to that point in its history. Thacker criticized everything from Redding's alleged "soft" approach to discipline, to banal play-calling to his mis-handling of stock-piled draft assets like **Colin Kaepernick** and **Rodney Hudson**. The battle became bitter, with Redding refusing to answer questions from Thacker during press briefings and Thacker in turn, refusing to name Redding in his columns, referring to him simply as "the coach."

The 'McGillicuddyists,' – the so-called silent majority – tend to be more traditional and conservative in their views of the team, yet reflect the forward-looking optimism of sports icon **Sparky McGillicuddy** of *The Iowan*. The



Melvin Ingram of Virden ambushed QBs all year, turning on the jets with 21 sacks in the final 8 weeks to finish with 28 on the season, shattering the previous record of 21, set in 2012 by former teammate *DeMarcus Ware*.

original voice of the Cubs in the mainstream Iowa media has been around to witness many changes in the sport. With the perspective of history to inform him he sees in the Cubs' coach a kind of visionary inculcating new values and attitudes needed for success in the 21st century. The Cubs are, as he wrote after the team's quarter final defeat of Virden: *"A brave, new team, finding its way to a new kind of victory on an ever-changing playing field; one where the line between physicality and destructive violence is constantly being redefined by a society engulfed in moral and ethical flux."*

McGillicuddy is a fan as much as he is an analyst; while Thacker is a virulent critic apparently incapable of celebrating the team's successes as long as Redding is at the helm. The differences were stark in the lead up to the semi-final between the Cubs and the Bombers in Bruxelles.

Redding's decision to fly the team to Belgium the night before the game in order to ensure his players were "not distracted by the attractions of Brussels" (not sure what attractions he is referring to there) and were able to enjoy all the comforts of home while preparing to face the Bombers was alternately described as "enlightened" by McGillicuddy and "idiotic" by Thacker. The decision to rest **Russell Wilson** for the entire week of practice in order to "recharge his batteries" was approvingly referred to as *"compassionate and wise"* by McGillicuddy; while Thacker wrote blisteringly that *"if the coach keeps molly-coddling Wilson he will ruin the only true warrior on his team. Russell will be sucking his thumb and asking for his 'blanky' in no time."* The pre-game issuance of 'Pacific Conference Final Participant' ball caps to his players as a "gift" for their efforts this year and Redding's pre-game pep talk, where he reportedly assured his players that they were "all winners in my eyes, no matter what happens on the football field today" drew an admiring 'Bravo!' from McGillicuddy in his pre-game TV short; while Thacker later lambasted it in his post-game article, 'Cubs Have a Little Accident in Belgium' as *"the most recent and pathetic example of the coach turning his men into boys."*

It is hard to know what single contributing factor outweighed all the others in the Cubs' dismal showing in their 44-33 loss to the Bombers at The Fortress this Sunday, but to isolate it is redundant at this point. For the most part, they stunk.

They certainly started slow: Wilson looked sluggish, missing open targets on the opening series and getting blindsided and stripped by **Frank Clark** on a three-step drop to start the second, which led to the Bombers first touchdown. Last week's hero, **Marqise Lee** looked dazed and confused as he decided to return a kickoff from 5-yards deep in the end zone, thought better of it for a split second, then committed at the last moment and, while focused on finding an opening in the quickly closing pursuit, had the ball punch out of his arms by **Josh Shaw** for a fumble that led to Bruxelles' third touchdown. By the time the Cubs woke up late in the

third quarter the Bombers were leading 41-10. It would have required Merlin-grade magic for comeback king **Russell Wilson** to overcome that deficit. He gave it a good try, piling up 23 points in a 16-minute span, but the gap was too wide, even for him.

Recriminations rained in from 'Thackerites' everywhere, led by Archibald himself, when Coach Redding, his voice hoarse from shouting encouragement and yipping with every first down gained in the futile last-minute pursuit of a miracle, pronounced to the media after the game, without a hint of irony, that "the boys gave it a good try out there today! We just ran out of time at the end."

"Time is part of the game," Thacker wrote in his post-game review. "Games have always been 60 minutes in duration. Saying you ran out of time is like complaining that you ran out of downs. Too bad, so sad. Possibly, if the Cubs had been properly prepared by their coach, they would not have spent the first 40 minutes of the game warming up before getting down to business."

McGillicuddy was kinder, but not without betraying some disappointment. *"A young team like the Cubs needs to take this lesson and learn from it,"* he wrote in his piece entitled, 'Great Comeback Effort Falls Short of Glory.' *"They let one get away from them. The coach can only take them so far. The players need to make themselves ready and know that in the final verdict of the score, there is no pity or pat on the back for falling short."*

There seems to be a prevailing perception from both camps in Iowa media, however, that the Cubs were the better team and, in a just and perfect world, should have won the game. It is a mis-conception in my view. The Bombers have clearly been one of the dominant offensive forces in the league all season and have so far held their form in the playoffs. **Marcus Mariota** & Co. moved around and through the staid and static Cubs' defence as if it was standing still – which for much of the first half it was. The turnovers in their favour simply accelerated the process. As for the Bruxelles' defence, the supposed weakness of the team, it was an ever-changing, dynamic, often aggressive, sometimes swarming, sometimes cagey entity that never gave Wilson exactly the same look twice. Unburdened by too much talent and its corresponding ego, it played with motivation and discipline just long enough for the offence to dig a hole too deep for Wilson climb out of.

The Bombers' victory and impending trip to the final can only help the EFL Europe experiment. The Belgians of the Capitol have taken to the Bombers in a big way. A recent *Oogvlet* poll shows that the Bombers and the EFL are closing in on Swimming as the 7th most watched sport in the country. In Bruxelles itself, the ranking is higher, with American Football eclipsing not only Swimming but standing neck-and-neck with Field Hockey at no.5.

Ken Main is a good ambassador for the sport, greeting the local Press haltingly, but charmingly, in both Dutch and French before launching into his generally positive post-game press conferences. Whether by accident or design, his decision to lead with Dutch has earned him the support of influential sports writer, **Faart van Wijnendaele** of the English language *Brussels Times*. Faart is the great nephew of pioneer of Flemish sports journalism, **Karel van Wijnendaele** and, like his great uncle, is a supporter of Flemish culture and language in Belgium as well as being an expert on the Tour of Flanders.

Winning over the Flemish nationalists may be the first step in establishing a true grassroots movement in support of the EFL in a foreign country, thousands of miles away from the birthplace of **Walter Camp**.

CHARGE OF THE MUSTANGS

Whether you love the Mustangs or hate them, there is no denying that they are on the verge of establishing the premier dynasty in league history. Sports analysts and fans have been hotly debating the respective merits of **Rich Liotta**'s four-year old Aurora juggernaut to the three-year reign of **Jim Heaton**'s Florida Dragons from 2008 to 2010. The sudden and unexpected morphing of the Dragons into the Blue Eagles in 2011 is a complicating issue for both sides in the debate. Neither can say for sure what might have been had the Dragons remained in Florida under the direction of its original architect. But for three years the Dragons dominated the league and were only deprived of a third straight Championship by a one-year wonder team from Pickering.

For my part, I believe the Mustangs are now one victory away from cementing the status of 'Best of All Time' after overrunning Budapest, 35-6 at Magna International Park in Aurora this Sunday. The ease with which they put away the North Stars came as a shock to pretty much the entire football world outside of Aurora itself, where confident and determined fans were lent a rough edge by the presence of some unexpected guests.

Having experienced bitter defeat for the first time in a Conference Final last year, Aurora fans came out not only to support their team, but to subject its opponent to a constant barrage of heckling and a wall of boos. This unusual aggression of the Magna crowd was reinforced by the deployment of a highly boisterous mob of supporters representing CORESTAR (The Committee to Return the Stolen North Stars to Markham). An army of approximately 2,000 Markhamites and supporters wearing black armbands picketed the stadium, throwing handfuls of goulash at anyone wearing North Stars paraphernalia who looked like they were there to support the visitors. A smaller group, composed of the most spiteful of the horde, managed to secure tickets for the game. Once inside, they used bullhorns to chant '*SHAME! SHAME!*' and "*DOWN WITH BOOOOOOOOO-DA-PEST!*", with long emphasis on the "boo" part, and generally incited the local Aurora fans to harass their opponent more than they usually might.

Subject to near universal hostility inside the stadium and certainly feeling the effects of severe jet-lag, the North Stars wilted under the heat of a torrid Mustangs team that, somewhat uncharacteristically, pulled back the throttle early in a rare act of mercy for their thoroughly beaten and demoralized opponent.

The Mustangs have had more flamboyant victories this year, but few have been as impressive as this one. **Matt Ryan** threw for only 216 yards, well below the almost 300-yard per game average he maintained during the regular season, but when he threw he

was devastating. From long touchdown passes to **Davante Adams** to medium tosses to **Kyle Rudolph** to convert 3rd and 4th downs, the league's top MVP candidate did what he had to do when he had to do it and, in the process, looked much deadlier than he does when he goes for broke attempting to break an opponent through sheer aerial force. As crucial to his team's success as his 4 touchdown passes was his avoidance of the interception. A viable Budapest victory scenario called for at least 2 of those and Ryan gave them none. It was a virtuoso effort from the undisputed leader of the team in 2017.

While the Aurora offence took the better part of the 2nd half off, the defence never relented. From the start they were out to prove that they too had a role to play in their team's perfect season. The opening North Stars' drive, although it yielded a field goal, was a precarious – some would say lucky – affair in which the fortuitous bounce of the pigskin on two occasions of **Brian Hoyer** being sacked and stripped by the Aurora pass rush merely staved off the inevitable rout by the total drive time of six-and-half minutes. While the pass rush kept Hoyer from getting too comfortable in the pocket, the Mustangs' secondary effectively transformed the stud Budapest wide receivers into geldings, keeping the offensive standout of last week, **Stefon Diggs** bottled up and giving **Demaryius Thomas** no room to breathe trying to run his pass routes. The only thing that worked for the Budapest offence was workhorse, **David Johnson**, but in the end the only impact he made was on the stat sheet.

After the game, **Rich Liotta** was customarily low-key in his post-game address to the media. After paying due deference to Ryan and noting the contribution of the defence as a team, he responded to a question from *EFL Magazine* editor, **Caleb Cogger** as to whether he had expected such an “easy win” over the North Stars. “This was not an easy win,” he replied with a straight face. “Despite what you journalists think you saw on the field from your vantage point in the seats.”

Invoking the threat-to-his-life excuse posed by the mob of CORESTAR supporters celebrating in front of Magna International Park, **Darrin Jones** ducked out of his own press conference, leaving tight ends coach, **Rob Chudzinski** holding the ball at the podium after the game. A clearly uncomfortable Chudzinski was not able to shed much light on the particulars of the Budapest game plan, apart from disavowing the decision to sit pass-catching threat **Jordan Reed** in favour of blocking specialist, **Anthony Fasano**. “It's my job to make sure the tight ends are ready to play their roles, not decide who gets to play,” he stated directly when asked why Reed only saw 14 snaps in a game where the Budapest air attack failed to takeoff. The anti-climactic post-game presser by the North Stars was a fitting finish for what was a decidedly anti-climactic Conference Finals weekend.

MVP SEARCH

My annual ritual of running down the MVP candidates who appear on the Affiliated Press (AP) official MVP Ballot is not going to carry the same impact as it has in other years for the simple reason that two players appear to have the awards locked up. It may generate some interest, however, in those who enjoy seeing how the art of sports journalism can be employed to present the illusion of a competitive race, when there is no competitive race to be had. For the Offence, the top candidate needs no introduction:

Matt Ryan (AUR) – In a season where defences wrestled more forcefully for control on the gridiron and quarterbacks collectively took a step back, Ryan posted the best numbers of his career. Falling 15 yards shy of 5,000 yards passing and 1 pass short of 50 TD passes, Ryan's 109.1 passer rating was almost a full 10 points better than his closest competitor. Oh, and did I mention that his team went 16-0 during the regular season?

Marcus Mariota (BRX) – For many of the same reasons as Ryan, Mariota deserves to be recognized for contributing more than anyone else to his team's astounding 13-3 regular season run. While his 3,081 passing yards, 27 TD passes and 100.1 passer rating in 15 starts were impressive, his 646 rushing yards and 6 TDs on the ground made him a unique and dangerous threat.

TY Hilton (DTL) – 94 catches, 1,739 yards and 16 TDs are outstanding numbers on their own. But considering that over half the time he was either double-teamed or his quarterback was having a meltdown, those results are truly astounding.

Best of the Rest: **Ezekiel Elliott (VIR)** – with 1,541 yards rushing and 14 TDs, arguably he *was* the Virden offence; **Julian Edelman (AUR)** – 23 TDs to lead the league; **Davante Adams (AUR)** – 19.7 yards-per-catch, 14 TDs and 19 plays of 25+ yards; **David Johnson (BUD)** – 1,946 total scrimmage yards and 9 TDs; **Doug Baldwin (SBE)** – 92 rec., 14 TDs, made his QB look good.

On the defensive side of the debate, there is essentially little to debate:

Melvin Ingram (VIR) – he turned it on in the second half of his 6th year with the Violators, registering 21 sacks in the final 8 weeks of the season to finish the season with 28 and shatter the previous record of 21 set by DeMarcus Ware, also as a Violator. He also registered 9 run stuffs, 5 forced fumbles and made 66 tackles.

Willie Young (AUR) – another 2nd half phenom, Young bagged 17 quarterbacks in the last 8 weeks to finish with 23 sacks on the season. Young did more than sack the QB; he also recorded 91 tackles and forced 4 fumbles to steal the mantle of Mustangs' defensive leader from the injured JJ Watt.

Landon Collins (SBE) – it was not all disappointment in Scarborough this year. 5 interceptions and 9 pass deflections are excellent numbers for a safety, but the hidden impact of this certain All-Pro was that quarterbacks only *attempted* 2 passes in his direction all year. That is as close to a “no-go zone” in the secondary as any player will ever be.

Best of the Rest: **Von Miller (YOR)** – 21 sacks and great in pass coverage; **Marcus Peters (SBE)** – 7 INTs and 40.2% comp. rate against; **Khalil Mack (SEA)** – 141 tackles, 17 run stuffs, 3 INTs, a rock for a team that got rocked; **Aaron Donald (MOH)** – 55 tackles, 10 sacks, 10 run stuffs, elite NT numbers; **Alec Ogletree (ICC)** – 145 tackles (no.1 EFL), 11 run stuffs, 3 INTs. **FEARLESS PREDICTION:** Alright, it's time for me to expose myself to the football world and put my reputation on the line with a prediction for the final. I probably should remind you all that I was correct in my prediction of a Twin Cities victory last year; a

Charleswood victory in 2015; and the Aurora perfect season wrap-up in 2014. The last time I was wrong was when I predicted Eli to take out his older brother Peyton in the 2013 Championship. I admit, I was guilty of a bit of “ageism” then as well as being somewhat partial to the Markham Magic that seemed to have a grip on the league for two seasons. I vowed, while shaking my fist at a darkened sky, that I would *never be wrong again* after that and this year will be no exception. Both these teams have impressed me in 2017 for many fairly obvious reasons, but I will reiterate the main one for each: their quarterbacks. **Matt Ryan** and **Marcus Mariota** are no.1 and no.2 in the league respectively and it is no coincidence that their respective teams have followed them to no.1 and no.2 respectively in the league during the regular season and post-season. We are fortunate to have the two best teams playing each other in the final. Many of you are probably expecting me to cite the erratically undulating season as my basis for predicting that, for the final, these two teams will trade places for one game and Bruxelles will prevail. Sorry, no can do. I expect that the rankings will hold in the final. I expect a good game, but I also expect a decisive Aurora victory – one befitting a balanced team with the league’s best quarterback, and my vote for MVP. There are avenues for the Bombers to pull off an upset, of course – I just don’t think they will find them because they will be chasing the Mustangs the entire way. So, there you have it, the outcome of the game before it is even played: *Aurora 30, Bruxelles 21*. See you in York! -Spats

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Jimmy's CHAMPIONSHIP PICK

At 'Camelot' in Avalon, York Township

BRUXELLES @ AURORA (line – MUSTANGS by 7)

INJURIES: Bruxelles – None; Aurora – None.

BACKGROUND: Since Bruxelles entered the league in 2012 as the Commonwealth Colonials they have faced Aurora just four times, posting a record of 1-3. Three of the four games were quite memorable. Aurora crowned its historic first perfect season by beating the then Cannibals 31-17 in the 2014 Championship. Although small consolation, the Cannibals got a bit of revenge the next season by crushing the Mustangs 52-17; giving the team its only loss of the 2015 regular season and forcing the worst margin of defeat ever on a Rich Liotta-coached team. When these teams met recently in Week Three, the Mustangs were forced to hold on to a 31-24 win after jumping out to an early 21-3 lead. The Bombers have made the post-season twice, making it to the final both times. The Mustangs are in the post-season for the 4th-straight year under Liotta and making their third Championship appearance.

WHEN BRUXELLES HAS THE BALL: The Bombers got this far because of their offence. Ranked second in efficiency and averaging 26 points per game, they were effective in all phases while operating primarily out of the standard “Pro” set. They were able to run a full playbook out of this formation thanks in large measure to Marcus Mariota’s rare combination of pocket presence and elusiveness that enabled him to extend plays for his receivers to get open or to salvage yards on the ground with his mobility. Having a top-notch running back like Leonard Fournette behind him impels opposing defenders to respect the run while keeping the other eye on playmakers Terrelle Pryor Sr., Emmanuel Sanders and Travis Kelce. Opposing defences can never be sure what is coming next. Less noticed but of paramount importance to the Bombers’ success has been the lack of turnovers – only 10 all season, with just 4 of those being interceptions, both best in the league. An equally unsung presence is Joe Thomas, who grades out tops overall in *PFFP* rankings at tackle and has allowed just one sack in 995 snaps this year. For the Bombers, the entire playbook will be on the table at virtually all times. Expect them to make this plain to Mustangs’ defence with more than one attempt to stretch the field early, probably in unconventional situations, after softening up the front seven with an emphasis on Fournette in the running game. They will also mix in screens and short slants in an attempt to slow down Aurora’s sack monster, Willie Young. The Mustangs’ defence has been solid, ranked second in total yards-per-game and no.1 overall in passing yards, but they are vulnerable to the run, surrendering a league worst 5.2 yards per carry. Few opposing teams have been able to properly exploit this weakness as

they inevitably find themselves playing catch-up early. The Mustangs will have to choose between taking away one aspect of the Bombers' attack at the expense of the other, or play the non-committal, bend-not-break game early while getting a sense of the Bomber game plan. But even a well-executed defensive game plan will founder if Mariota is on his game. Most of his 646 rushing yards came turning broken plays into big ones – a demoralizing knife in the heart of all defences.

WHEN AURORA HAS THE BALL: The only offence more imposing than the Bombers' this year belonged to the Mustangs. Not only was it the most efficient in the league by half-a-yard per play, it scored a whopping 561 points, 140 more than Bruxelles, their closest competition. Capable of striking quickly, they can also control the ball, converting a league high 52% of 3rd downs and a crazy 75% of 4th downs. It is no secret why they were so successful: Matt Ryan had a career year in a year when most quarterbacks were worrying about their careers. His 109.1 passer rating, 4,985 passing yards and 49 TD passes led the league by a wide margin and his principal targets, Julian Edelman, Davante Adams and Kyle Rudolph all benefitted with career years of their own. Their collective play was a textbook example of a symbiotic relationship in action, with each complementing the other to create a force greater than the sum of its parts. The modus operandi of this offence was well-known, but still unstoppable. Expect the Mustangs to not change anything in this game, even if it isn't working early, against a Bombers' defence that has always been the weak link of the team. Ranked 20th overall in efficiency, the Bombers have managed to disguise their fundamental weaknesses by blitzing heavily with team sack-leader Emmanuel Ogbah. He and defensive lineman Frank Clark are the pressure generators that disrupt drives and force field goals instead of touchdowns in the red zone. The rest is a team effort, with the Bruxelles offence being a part of that team by creating circumstances that allow the defence to play downhill most of the time. The Aurora game plan will be, as always, to put that defence on its back foot early and keep the pressure on until it breaks. Expect to see Kenyan Drake and Danny Woodhead pop up occasionally with double-digit runs at the most inopportune times for the defence, draining life from the pass rush that is a small hope for the Bombers' defence against them. But the Bombers' best hope lies in Ryan himself. In an MVP-grade season, his 13 interceptions are a mildly sobering red flag, camouflaged to this point by all his blood-letting of his opponents.

THE WAY I SEE IT: I don't consider it a cop-out to say that this game could go either way. It is the reality. The Bombers have been underestimated all year and to do so here would be foolish, notwithstanding that the Mustangs have dismantled all comers to this point with relative ease. Back in Week Three, the Bombers withstood the Mustangs' early onslaught and came back to make a close game of it. If they can somehow turn that around, I am not sure that the Mustangs' could do the same; they have never had to play from behind late in a game all season. Matt Ryan's rally skills have not been tested in over a year and his proclivity for the interception could, in such a situation, be the final nail in the coffin in any last-minute comeback. Much will depend on what transpires in the first quarter. If the Mustangs succeed in delivering "shock and awe" in their opening three or four possessions, the game will probably go the way of their previous match-up, with Bruxelles falling short in the end. But if the Bombers can match blow-for-blow, it will come down to who makes the most, or the worst, mistakes. Despite their dominance this season, the Mustangs are more prone to making offensive mistakes. Whatever happens early, I do not expect this to end as a blowout for either side. The Bombers simply will not give up on the big stage. Expect them to be the first team to knock off a perfect opponent in the final game of the year, or to go down fighting honourably. **PICK: BRUXELLES**



ANCIENT HISTORY CHANNEL PRESENTS

This Week in EFL History *With Professor Sterling Smitherman*

FROM THE EFL ARCHIVES – The Conference Finals in 2011 featured the free-wheeling passing attack of the Death Valley Undertakers against the steadfast LA Knights' 'Blue Shield' defence in the Pacific-Atlantic Conference; and **Tim Tebow** and the Dinos against Gwinnett's **LeSean McCoy** and **Vince Young** in the Can-Am Conference. This was a relatively new array of competitors for this deep into the playoffs, with Florida/Scarborough, Charleswood and Pickering notably absent from the field.

The game between the Undertakers and Knights at Round Table Stadium did not disappoint. It was everything it

had been cracked up to be, with **Drew Brees** of Death Valley attempting 57 passes for 457 yards and 2 TDs against the league's best defence. But despite bending uncomfortably backwards, the LA defence stole the show in the end by forcing 4 turnovers, including a game-changing strip-sack of Brees by **Brian Orakpo** in the 4th quarter. He lateralled the ball to **Charles Woodson**, who returned it 41 yards for the eventual game-winning TD in a rare 35-33 shootout win for LA.

In Gwinnett, the contest was an austere and largely highlight-free affair, with the home team coming out on top 24-10. The Gladiators kept it simple by running the ball against a Durham defence that had struggled to stop the run all season. When a pass was needed, **Vince Young** was only too happy to provide it. The Durham game plan was hard to discern because whatever they tried did not work. The running game was quickly abandoned, putting the game in the incapable hands of **Philip Rivers**. Not even **Tim Tebow** was able to rescue such a totally uninspired team effort. Eventually **John Skelton** was inserted at QB; he threw Durham's only TD pass of the day.

This set up an unanticipated, but curiously intriguing Championship between LA and Gwinnett in Charleswood.