

2018



QUARTER



EFL

ELITE FOOTBALL LEAGUE

2018



FINALS

In our 12th season and still going strong!
February 10, 2019

EAST



CENTRAL



WEST



NORTH



COASTAL



SOUTH



CHINO	7	IOWA CITY	19	COWTOWN	31	YORK	18
ST. CHARLES	27	TWIN CITIES	27	ASTIAN	17	TORONTO	15



*Melvin Gordon
Twin Cities Triumph*

Twin Cities running back *Melvin Gordon* follows a downfield block on his way to a touchdown to get his team on the scoreboard in the 1st quarter. The Triumph rebounded from an early 10-0 deficit and went on to dismantle the visiting Cubs, 27-19 in a tough Quarter Finals match-up. They will face the surprising Chargers in the Pacific Final, who shocked Chino 27-7.



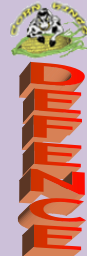
*Who was slick
in the Quarter
Finals?*

**“Brylcreem” THE
EFL’S FIRST SPONSOR**



Melvin Gordon
RB
Twin Cities
Triumph

100 yards rushing, 68 yards rec., 1 TD. Centerpiece of Triumph attack.



TJ Watt
LB
Cowtown
Corn Kings

18 Tackles, 1 Stuff. Was all over field. Made key 4th down stop in 4th.



7

Chino



GAME CENTER
2018
Pacific Quarter Finals



27

St. Charles

TEAM LEADERS

Passing	Cmp	Att	Yds	TD
Prescott	22	42	155	0
Rushing	Car	Yds	Avg	TD
Ingram	16	73	4.6	0
Receiving	Rec	Yds	Avg	TD
McCaffery	11	44	4.0	0

Team

Chino

St. Charles

1

2

3

4

OT

Total

7

0

0

0

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7

7

7

10

3

-

27

Play of the Game

In the 3rd quarter, 9:12 mark, Chargers leading 14-7. **Tess Way** punt is high and well-covered, but **Travis Benjamin** follows a great block and breaks free for an 82-yard punt return TD.

TEAM LEADERS

Passing	Cmp	Att	Yds	TD
Wentz	7	14	64	1
Rushing	Car	Yds	Avg	TD
Cook	8	69	8.6	0
Receiving	Rec	Yds	Avg	TD
Thomas	2	30	15.0	0

ELECTRIC PLAYS POWER CHARGERS!

LEWIS 48-YARD RUN, BENJAMIN 82-YARD PUNT RETURN BREAK GAME OPEN!

SUMMARY: The Convicts entered this game as a rare wildcard favourite on the road. The +2 line was billboard material for the no.1 seed Chargers as they defended their home turf for the first time in the post-season. The numbers favoured Chino and many believed that they possessed the offensive tools to dismantle the upstart Chargers. But the Chargers were accustomed to being discounted. Getting slapped with the underdog tag played right into their hands. The Charger win that followed wasn't pretty, but it was decisive. But things did not get off to a great start for QB, **Carson Wentz**. He led a drive to the Chino 10-yard line on his team's first possession only to be picked off in the end zone by Convict corner **Trumaine Johnson**. The Convicts appeared determined to repeat the formula of their wildcard win over Bruxelles. But the Chargers countered almost immediately when corner **Ahkello Witherspoon** tipped a pass over the middle by **Dak Prescott** and hauled in his own deflection for an interception and 23-yard return to the Chino 8. After a 3-yard stuff of **Dion Lewis** and an incomplection, Wentz threw a dart to **Roger Lewis** for an 11-yard TD pass to put the Chargers in front. The Convicts answered with a 68-yard drive that featured some hard running by **Mark Ingram** and a 20-yard screen pass to **Christian McCaffery** to help set up a 2-yard TD run by **Ronald Jones**. An attempted sideline punt by **Tess Way** traveled only 33 yards and stayed in bounds, allowing **Travis Benjamin** to return it 10 yards and set the Chargers up near mid-field. Soon after, Lewis broke free off right tackle and bolted 48 yards to the end zone for the go-ahead touchdown. The teams exchanged punts to end the 1st half and begin the 2nd half. Chino's Way launched a high drifting punt that looked to be well-covered. But Benjamin fielded the punt at his 18, made a move, got a block and was off to the races for an 82-yard touchdown return. Now down by 14 points, the Convicts started to gamble. They went for it on 4th & 16 at the St. Charles 44 and ended up in their own territory after a 10-yard sack by **Yannick Ngakoue**. The good field position led to a 51-yard **Steven Hauschka** FG to put the Chargers in front 24-7. Chino hit a 4th down wall in the 4th quarter trying to get back in the game while the Chargers ran out the clock for the win.

QUOTES: "We gave up a few big plays and did not generate any of our own. Obviously, the punt return for a touchdown was huge for them. That kind of put us on our heels a bit and they took advantage. We need to get better at moving the ball in those situations." – Chino coach, **Rob Nazar**.
 "I'm not afraid to say it – we got a bit lucky. We need to play better on offence. I thought our defence performed well enough to take advantage of our good fortune. But we can't be relying on long runs and punt returns and expect to survive in the playoffs." – St. Charles owner, **John Clingan**



ANGRY FAN



titter

HAPPY FAN



Quentin San Pedro @QSP

#Convicts did not bring it today. Long flight, Taco Bell on Saturday night got to them. Respect bros!



Thomas Jenifer @thomasjeniferM-I

Fortune continues to shine on the Chargers. @JClingan wants more. Will he get it?



Chino 7 St. Charles 27

	1	2	3	4	F
Chino	7	0	0	0	7
St. Charles	7	7	10	3	27



* Playoff * 02-10-2019 St. Charles Stadium Temp:72 Wind: No Line MVP:Benjamin

1	9:12	St. Charles	TD	Wentz 11 pass to Lewis (Hauschka) (3-8-0:49)	0-7
1	0:44	Chino	TD	Jones 2 run (Bailey,D) (15-68-8:20)	7-7
2	8:05	St. Charles	TD	Lewis 48 run (Hauschka) (3-60-1:42)	7-14
3	9:12	St. Charles	TD	Benjamin 82 punt return (Hauschka)	7-21
3	1:28	St. Charles	FG	Hauschka 51 (6-13-2:07)	7-24
4	4:33	St. Charles	FG	Hauschka 41 (8-20-5:19)	7-27

Player Stats

Passing	Att	Cmp	Yds	25	In	Td	Sk	Rate
Prescott	42	22	155	1	1	0	3	51.2
	42	22	155	1	1	0	3	51.2

Passing	Att	Cmp	Yds	25	In	Td	Sk	Rate
Wentz	14	7	64	0	1	1	0	56.8
	14	7	64	0	1	1	0	56.8

Rushing	Att	Yds	Avg	FD	10	Lg	Td
Ingram	16	73	4.6	4	2	12	0
Prescott	6	26	4.3	3	1	11	0
Jones	3	5	1.7	2	0	3	1
McCaffrey	3	5	1.7	0	0	5	0
	28	109	3.9	9	3	12	1

Rushing	Att	Yds	Avg	FD	10	Lg	Td
Cook	8	69	8.6	4	4	16	0
Lewis,D	12	57	4.8	1	1	48	1
Core	8	20	2.5	1	0	6	0
Wentz	2	6	3.0	0	0	7	0
Line	1	4	4.0	1	0	4	0
	31	156	5.0	7	5	48	1

Receiving	No	Dp	Att	Yds	Avg	FD	25	Lg	Td
McCaffrey	11	0	19	44	4.0	3	0	20	0
Jones Jr	4	0	9	56	14.0	2	1	27	0
Goodwin	3	0	4	24	8.0	2	0	11	0
Ingram	2	0	4	21	10.5	1	0	15	0
Agholor	2	0	4	10	5.0	1	0	6	0
Sefarian-Jenkins	0	0	1	0	0.0	0	0	0	0
Bryant	0	1	1	0	0.0	0	0	0	0
	22	1	42	155	7.0	9	1	27	0

Receiving	No	Dp	Att	Yds	Avg	FD	25	Lg	Td
Cook	2	0	2	4	2.0	0	0	5	0
Thomas	2	0	5	30	15.0	2	0	17	0
Graham	2	1	3	19	9.5	2	0	10	0
Lewis,R	1	0	1	11	11.0	1	0	11	1
Wright	0	0	1	0	0.0	0	0	0	0
Benjamin	0	0	1	0	0.0	0	0	0	0
Lewis,D	0	1	1	0	0.0	0	0	0	0
	7	2	14	64	9.1	5	0	17	1

Fumbles	No	Rec	Td
Prescott	2	2	0
	2	2	0

Fumbles	No	Rec	Td
	0	0	0

Kick Returns	No	Yds	Avg	Lg	Td
Jones	4	100	25.0	31	0
McCaffrey	1	11	11.0	11	0
	5	111	22.2	31	0

Kick Returns	No	Yds	Avg	Lg	Td
Lewis,D	1	22	22.0	22	0
	1	22	22.0	22	0

Punt Returns	No	Fc	Yds	Avg	Lg	Td
McCaffrey	2	2	13	6.5	13	0
	2	2	13	6.5	13	0

Punt Returns	No	Fc	Yds	Avg	Lg	Td
Benjamin	6	0	119	19.8	82	1
	6	0	119	19.8	82	1

Kicking	FG	Lg	XP	Pts
Bailey	0-0	0	1-1	1

Kicking	FG	Lg	XP	Pts
Hauschka	2-2	51	3-3	9

Punting	No	Yds	Avg	Tb	20	Bk	Lg
Way	6	242	40.3	0	1	0	47

Punting	No	Yds	Avg	Tb	20	Bk	Lg
Lechler	5	234	46.8	0	3	0	54

Defense	Tkl	Sk	Def	Stf	Hur	FF	Int
Rankins	9	0	0	2	0	0	0-0
Shazier	6	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Short	5	0	0	1	1	0	0-0
Johnson	3	0	1	0	0	0	1-0
Robertson	3	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Bethea	3	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
McKinley	2	0	0	1	1	0	0-0
Orakpo	2	0	0	0	1	0	0-0
Jackson,J	2	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Anderson	2	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Jarrett	1	0	0	0	1	0	0-0
Lawler	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Smith	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Ejofor	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Nickerson	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
	42	0	1	4	4	0	1-0

Defense	Tkl	Sk	Def	Stf	Hur	FF	Int
Davis	8	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Leonard	7	1	0	1	0	0	0-0
Ngakoue	6	1	0	0	3	1	0-0
Jackson	6	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Barrett	6	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Parker	5	0	1	0	0	0	0-0
Peppers	4	1	0	0	2	0	0-0
Carrie	4	0	2	0	0	0	0-0
Williams	3	0	1	0	0	0	0-0
Anderson	2	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Griffin	2	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Witherspoon	1	0	1	0	0	0	1-23
Ellis	1	0	0	1	2	1	0-0
Spence	1	0	1	0	1	0	0-0
Wise Jr	1	0	0	0	1	0	0-0
Peterson	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Vanderdoes	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
McCullers	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Armstrong	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Jenkins	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
	62	3	6	2	9	2	1-23

	Chino	St. Charles
First Downs	18	12
Rushes	28-109	31-156
Passes	22-42-155	7-14-64
Sacked	3-26	0-0
Fumble	2	0
Penalties	5-47	4-30
Turnovers	1	1
Missed Tackles	2	9
Dropped Passes	1	2
Bad Passes	1	1
Passes 25+	1	0
Runs 10+	3	5
Blitzers	6	6
Time	35:37	24:23
Third Down	7-17	2-10
Fourth Down	0-3	1-1
Red Att/Td/Fg	1/1/0	2/1/0
Net Offense	238	220



M.V.P.



TRAVIS BENJAMIN
ST. CHARLES

82-yard punt return for a TD in 3rd
broke the game open for Chargers.



19

Iowa City

EFL
ELITE FOOTBALL LEAGUE

GAME CENTER

2018

Pacific Quarter Finals



27

Twin Cities

TEAM LEADERS

Passing	Cmp	Att	Yds	TD
Wilson	15	21	238	1
Rushing	Car	Yds	Avg	TD
Wilson	12	66	5.5	0
Receiving	Rec	Yds	Avg	TD
Wallace	7	146	20.9	1

Team	1	2	3	4	OT	Total
Iowa City	10	3	3	3	-	19
Twin Cities	7	7	7	6	-	27

Play of the Game

4th quarter, 5:06 left, Triumph leading 24-16, Cubs driving, safety
Bradley Roby jumps the short quick out route to **Christian Kirk** for
 an interception that led to FG and late two-score advantage.

TEAM LEADERS

Passing	Cmp	Att	Yds	TD
Palmer	15	22	206	2
Rushing	Car	Yds	Avg	TD
Gordon	21	100	4.8	0
Receiving	Rec	Yds	Avg	TD
White	6	77	12.8	0

TRIUMPH ADVANCE ON BACKS OF CUBBIES!

MELVIN GORDON & BRADLEY ROBY TEAM-UP TO SUBDUE CUBS!

SUMMARY: The Cubs came to Willhalla Stadium not only looking to advance, but to avenge the Week Five loss to this same Triumph squad that had deprived them of a chance to play at home to start the post-season. They got off to a fast start when, on the second play from scrimmage, **Mike Wallace** snagged a medium slant pass from **Russell Wilson** and charged through the heart of the Triumph secondary to a 78-yard touchdown. After forcing a Triumph three-and-out, the Cubs struck again on a 29-yard **Justin Tucker** field goal to increase their lead to 10-0. The quick two-score deficit seemed to wake up the home team. **Melvin Gordon** hugged the sideline for an 18-yard run and **James White** turned a screen into a 21-yard gain to spur a drive that ended with **Carson Palmer** finding Gordon over the middle for an 18-yard TD pass. The Triumph defence stepped up and stopped the Cubs near mid-field on the next series. That set the stage for an epic 14-play, 96-yard drive, culminating in a 1-yard **Royce Freeman** TD run to put the Triumph in front 14-10. The Cubs survived a fumble by Wilson to drive to the Triumph red zone, but ran out of time and settled for a field goal as time expired in the first half. Twin Cities got the ball first to start the second half and made the most of it, driving 75 yards and finishing with a 16-yard TD pass to **Antonio Brown**. The Cubs drove back but were once again stopped inside the red zone, leading to a 36-yard Tucker field goal. The Triumph ground out another long drive, this time taking 16 plays and over 9 minutes to move 81 yards and get in position for a 24-yard **Dustin Hopkins** field goal to extend their lead to 24-16. With still more than 8 minutes remaining in the 4th quarter, the Cubs responded with a sense of urgency, converting a 4th & 1 at their own 35 on a 1-yard pass to Wallace. But as they looked to cross mid-field, corner **Bradley Roby** jumped a quick out pass intended for **Christian Kirk** and returned it 19-yards to the Cubs' 33. Hopkins salvaged a short three-and-out with a 49-yard FG to give Twin Cities an 11-point lead with 3:37 left. The Cubs switched to the hurry-up offence, completing a series of short passes before being stopped and settling for a FG with 0:57 left. **Taywan Taylor** recovered the desperation onside kick by Tucker, allowing the Triumph to kneel three times for the win.

QUOTES: "Today, we faced a tough team on their home turf and lost. But I don't consider that a bad reflection on what our players achieved this year. We overcame challenges and came up 3 wins short of a championship. I'm proud of the boys!" – Iowa City coach, **Deron Redding**.

"I didn't like that we allowed them into the red zone four times, but I like that we held them to field goals when we did. Bradley's interception was all him. We were waiting for the run but he sniffed it out and took a chance. It was the turning point, in my opinion." – Triumph coach, **Guy Williams**.



ANGRY FAN



titter

HAPPY FAN



Archibald Thacker @ArchieDMR
 The Cubs are never to going anywhere in the playoffs with Coach Softie in charge of the daycare at Joe Ferguson Stadium.



Lars Odegard @LarsValhalla
 Pick by @BradRoby_1 was huge but @melvingordon25 was the unsung hero of this game.



Iowa City 19 Twin Cities 27

	1	2	3	4	F
Iowa City	10	3	3	3	19
Twin Cities	7	7	7	6	27



* Playoff * 02-10-2019 Wilhalla Stadium Temp:70 Wind: No Line MVP:Gordon

1	13:50	Iowa City	TD	Wilson 78 pass to Wallace (Tucker,J) (2-69-1:04)	7-0
1	6:25	Iowa City	FG	Tucker 29 (10-52-5:38)	10-0
1	2:05	Twin Cities	TD	Palmer 18 pass to Gordon (Hopkins,D) (8-75-4:20)	10-7
2	4:28	Twin Cities	TD	Freeman 1 run (Hopkins,D) (14-96-7:19)	10-14
2	0:00	Iowa City	FG	Tucker 27 (9-64-4:22)	13-14
3	9:22	Twin Cities	TD	Palmer 16 pass to Brown (Hopkins,D) (11-75-5:38)	13-21
3	3:25	Iowa City	FG	Tucker 36 (9-51-5:47)	16-21
4	8:43	Twin Cities	FG	Hopkins 24 (16-81-9:33)	16-24
4	3:27	Twin Cities	FG	Hopkins 49 (4-2-1:35)	16-27
4	0:57	Iowa City	FG	Tucker 29 (10-56-2:18)	19-27

Player Stats

Passing	Att	Cmp	Yds	25	In	Td	Sa	Rate
Wilson	21	15	238	1	1	1	2	104.9
	21	15	238	1	1	1	2	104.9

Rushing	Att	Yds	Avg	FD	10	Lg	Td
Wilson	12	66	5.5	5	4	14	0
Powell	12	54	4.5	2	2	15	0
McKinnon	2	4	2.0	0	0	6	0
Lee	1	2	2.0	0	0	2	0
	27	126	4.7	7	6	15	0

Receiving	No	Dp	Att	Yds	Avg	FD	25	Lg	Td
Wallace	7	2	10	146	20.9	4	1	78	1
Lee	4	0	4	51	12.8	4	0	19	0
McKinnon	2	0	3	27	13.5	1	0	24	0
Lockett	2	0	2	14	7.0	0	0	8	0
Powell	0	0	1	0	0.0	0	0	0	0
Kirk	0	0	1	0	0.0	0	0	0	0
	16	2	21	238	11.3	9	1	78	1

Fumbles	No	Rec	Td
Wilson	1	0	0
Wallace	0	1	0
	1	1	0

Kick Returns	No	Yds	Avg	Lg	Td
McKinnon	4	68	17.0	26	0
Lockett	2	54	27.0	29	0
	6	122	20.3	29	0

Punt Returns	No	Fc	Yds	Avg	Lg	Td
Davis	1	0	8	8.0	8	0
	1	0	8	8.0	8	0

Kicking	FG	Lg	XP	Pts
Tucker	4-4	36	1-1	13

Punting	No	Yds	Avg	Tb	20	Bk	Lg
Pinion	1	38	38.0	0	1	0	38

Defense	Tkl	Sk	Def	Str	Hur	FF	Int
Ogletree	9	0	1	1	0	1	0-0
Pierre-Paul	8	0	0	2	0	0	0-0
Tomlinson	6	0	0	3	2	0	0-0
Jewell	5	0	1	1	0	0	0-0
Emanuel	4	0	1	0	0	0	0-0
Hayward	4	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Cox	2	0	0	0	1	0	0-0
Hill,D	2	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Bouye	2	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Richardson	2	0	0	1	0	0	0-0
Jenkins	1	0	1	0	0	0	0-0
Wilson	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Johnson,J	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Rhodes	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Johnson,K	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
	49	0	4	8	3	1	0-0

Passing	Att	Cmp	Yds	25	In	Td	Sa	Rate
Palmer	22	15	206	0	0	2	0	128.2
	22	15	206	0	0	2	0	128.2

Rushing	Att	Yds	Avg	FD	10	Lg	Td
Gordon	21	100	4.8	5	2	27	0
Freeman	7	42	6.0	2	1	10	1
Janowich	1	8	8.0	1	0	8	0
White	1	2	2.0	1	0	2	0
Palmer	5	-7	-1.4	0	0	0	0
	35	145	4.1	9	3	27	1

Receiving	No	Dp	Att	Yds	Avg	FD	25	Lg	Td
White	6	0	7	77	12.8	4	0	21	0
Gordon	5	1	10	68	13.6	4	0	18	1
Brown,A	3	0	3	49	16.3	3	0	22	1
Matthews	1	0	1	12	12.0	1	0	12	0
Clay	0	1	1	0	0.0	0	0	0	0
	15	2	22	206	13.7	12	0	22	2

Fumbles	No	Rec	Td
Palmer	1	1	0
	1	1	0

Kick Returns	No	Yds	Avg	Lg	Td
Nelson	1	11	11.0	11	0
Taylor	1	0	0.0	0	0
	2	11	5.5	11	0

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

Kicking	FG	Lg	XP	Pts
Hopkins	2-2	49	3-3	9

Punting	No	Yds	Avg	Tb	20	Bk	Lg
Jones	1	41	41.0	0	0	0	41

Defense	Tkl	Sk	Def	Str	Hur	FF	Int
Alexander,K	10	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Harris Jr	6	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Wagner	5	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Hunter	4	1	0	0	0	0	0-0
Bradham	4	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Slay	4	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Roby	3	0	0	0	0	1	1-19
Clark	3	0	0	1	0	0	0-0
Casey	2	1	0	0	1	0	0-0
Alexander,J	2	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Jones	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Brown,B	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Nicholson	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Crawford	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Hughes	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Smith	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Janowich	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
	50	2	0	1	1	1	1-19



M.V.P.



MELVIN GORDON
TWIN CITIES

100 yards rushing, 68 yards receiving,
1 TD. Engine driving Triumph offence.

Team Stats

	Iowa City	Twin Cities
First Downs	18	21
Rushes	27-126	35-145
Passes	15-21-238	15-22-206
Sacked	2-13	0-0
Fumble	1	1
Penalties	3-25	6-40
Turnovers	1	0
Missed Tackles	17	6
Dropped Passes	2	2
Bad Passes	2	0
Passes 25+	1	0
Runs 10+	6	3
Blitzers	4	8
Time	28:42	31:18
Third Down	2-8	7-12
Fourth Down	1-1	1-1
Red Att/Td/Fg	4/0/4	4/3/1
Net Offense	351	351



31

Cowtown



17

Sebastian

TEAM LEADERS

Passing	Cmp	Att	Yds	TD
Garoppolo	16	21	226	3
Rushing	Car	Yds	Avg	TD
Gurley	12	47	3.9	0
Receiving	Rec	Yds	Avg	TD
Gurley	7	105	15.0	2

Team

Cowtown

1

2

3

4

OT

Total

Sebastian

7

3

0

7

-

17

Play of the Game

In the 4th quarter, 8:56 left, after Sebastian had scored a TD to pull within 6 points, Cowtown kick returner **Matthew Dayes** bolted to a 71-yard kick return, setting up a crucial Cowtown TD 2 plays later.

TEAM LEADERS

Passing	Cmp	Att	Yds	TD
Brees	17	24	149	2
Rushing	Car	Yds	Avg	TD
Anderson	23	112	4.9	0
Receiving	Rec	Yds	Avg	TD
Baldwin	6	72	12.0	1

SWORDFISH DAYESED BY CORN KINGS!

GAROPPOLO 3 TDS, DAYES 71-YARD KICK RETURN RUINS SWORDFISH RALLY

SUMMARY: The Corn Kings came into Sebastian looking to be the first wildcard winner to advance beyond the wildcard game. However, they had never won at The Fish Tank in three trips, including a 27-22 defeat there in Week 15 of the regular season. This contest started as if that streak was bound to continue. The Corn Kings started shakily, with **Jimmy Garoppolo** fumbling the game's first snap to usher in an opening three-and-out. The Swordfish responded with a solid 9-play drive, kept alive by a 4th & 2 conversion at their 45 and capped by a 34-yard TD pass from **Drew Brees** to **Doug Baldwin**. A squib kick-off was picked up at the Cowtown 37 and returned to the Swordfish 48. Garoppolo made the most of the great starting field position by finishing off the short drive with passes of 16 and 22 yards to **Mike Evans**, the last resulting in a touchdown to even the score. Sebastian charged right back but hit a wall at the Cowtown 4-yard line when **CJ Anderson** was stuffed for a loss on 3rd down, causing them to settle for a field goal. **Matt Bryant** tied the game with a 54-yard boot to continue the tit-for-tat. The Swordfish pressed to regain the lead, but a 1-yard stuff of **Royce Freeman** on 3rd & 1 followed by a 6-yard **Marcell Dareus** sack of Brees on 4th down turned the ball over to Cowtown at their 41. Consecutive passes of 16 and 22 yards to **Todd Gurley II** and a 16-yard completion to Evans positioned them for a 12-yard TD pass on 3rd & goal to Gurley to give Cowtown a 17-10 halftime lead. Sebastian got the ball to start the 2nd half but came away empty when Anderson was stuffed on 4th & 1 at the Cowtown 35. The visitors drove back for a FG then added another FG to make it 23-10 after Anderson again came up short on 4th down, this time at his team's 40-yard line. As the 3rd quarter wound down the Swordfish launched a determined drive from their 20, down by two scores. A 10-yard run by Anderson on 4th & 1 entered the red zone and 4 plays later Brees slung it to Anderson for a 3-yard TD pass to close the gap to 6 points. However, returner **Matthew Dayes** turned the momentum back in the visitors' favour with an electrifying 71-yard kick return, setting up a 34-yard TD pass to Gurley. **Mike Hilton** sacked Brees for a safety two series later to cap the scoring while the Cowtown secondary hung tough to finish off the upset.

QUOTES: "They are a very tough team at home and they played well today. So, I am pretty damn proud of our effort on both sides of the ball. Todd and Jimmy were amazing and I can't say enough about the defence making all of those 4th down stops!" – Cowtown coach, **Jim Coghlin**.

"They made big plays out there, but as for a single play, that big kick return after we marched down and scored had the biggest impact on the game getting away from us. Should it have come to that? Probably, no. But I liked our chances until that play." – Sebastian coach, **Russ Lemmon**.



HAPPY FAN



titter

ANGRY FAN



Orville Smucker @Smuckerscoop
Cannot pick up milk Myrna because I am in Florida. Joe and the boys won!



Jean Boisvert @JB-SwamplandP
The downside of being aggressive on fourth down is that it can break a team as much as it can make a team. 4th down broke the team today.



Garoppolo QB	Gurley II RB	Evans WR

Cowtown 31 Sebastian 17

	1	2	3	4	F
Cowtown	7	10	6	8	31
Sebastian	7	3	0	7	17

Jones OLB	Anderson RB	Brees QB



* Playoff * 02-09-2019 The Fish Tank Temp:76 Wind: *Internet* No Line MVP:Gurley II HFA:ON(4)

1	8:22	Sebastian	TD	Brees 34 pass to Baldwin (Vinatieri) (9-65-4:20)	0-7
1	5:31	Cowtown	TD	Garoppolo 22 pass to Evans (Bryant,M) (6-48-2:46)	7-7
2	14:11	Sebastian	FG	Vinatieri 23 (12-87-6:19)	7-10
2	8:16	Cowtown	FG	Bryant 54 (10-39-5:48)	10-10
2	1:52	Cowtown	TD	Garoppolo 12 pass to Gurley II (Bryant,M) (6-59-1:55)	17-10
3	5:20	Cowtown	FG	Bryant 26 (9-56-3:48)	20-10
3	1:08	Cowtown	FG	Bryant 50 (4-8-2:00)	23-10
4	8:56	Sebastian	TD	Brees 3 pass to Anderson (Vinatieri) (16-80-7:06)	23-17
4	7:55	Cowtown	TD	Garoppolo 34 pass to Gurley II (2 - failed) (2-28-0:54)	29-17
4	2:44	Cowtown	Safety	Hilton	31-17

Fumbles	No	Rec	Td
Garoppolo	1	1	0
	1	1	0

Kick Returns	No	Yds	Avg	Lg	Td
Dayes	3	105	35.0	71	0
	3	105	35.0	71	0

Punt Returns	No	Fc	Yds	Avg	Lg	Td
Campanaro	1	0	8	8.0	8	0
	1	0	8	8.0	8	0

Kicking	FG	Lg	XP	Pts
Bryant	3-3	54	2-2	11

Punting	No	Yds	Avg	Tb	20	Bk	Lg
Hekker	3	112	37.3	0	2	0	42

Fumbles	No	Rec	Td
Winston	1	1	0
	1	1	0

Kick Returns	No	Yds	Avg	Lg	Td
Moore	4	63	15.8	21	0
Sproles	2	18	9.0	10	0
Feiler	1	10	10.0	10	0
	7	91	13.0	21	0

Punt Returns	No	Fc	Yds	Avg	Lg	Td
Clay	3	0	1	0.3	3	0
	3	0	1	0.3	3	0

Kicking	FG	Lg	XP	Pts
Vinatieri	1-1	23	2-2	5

Punting	No	Yds	Avg	Tb	20	Bk	Lg
Berry	1	38	38.0	0	0	0	38

Player Stats

Passing	Att	Cmp	Yds	25	In	Td	Sk	Rate
Garoppolo	21	16	226	1	0	3	3	150.0
	21	16	226	1	0	3	3	150.0

Rushing	Att	Yds	Avg	FD	10	Lg	Td
Gurley II	12	47	3.9	2	0	9	0
Blount	6	5	0.8	0	0	3	0
Garoppolo	3	1	0.3	1	0	1	0
Nelson	1	0	0.0	0	0	0	0
Flacco	2	-2	-1.0	0	0	0	0
	24	51	2.1	3	0	9	0

Receiving	No	Dp	Att	Yds	Avg	FD	25	Lg	Td
Gurley II	7	0	9	105	15.0	5	1	34	2
Evans	5	0	5	92	18.4	5	0	22	1
Humphries	2	0	4	18	9.0	1	0	10	0
Thomas	1	0	1	1	1.0	0	0	1	0
Fitzgerald	1	0	2	10	10.0	1	0	10	0
	16	0	21	226	14.1	12	1	34	3

Defense	Tkl	Sk	Def	Stf	Hur	FF	Int
Wait	18	0	0	1	0	0	0-0
Talib	8	0	1	0	0	0	0-0
Hilton	7	1	0	0	0	0	0-0
Darby	7	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
McLeod	6	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Kerngan	5	0	1	1	0	0	0-0
Ioannidis	2	1	0	0	0	1	0-0
Dareus	2	1	0	0	0	0	0-0
Smith	2	0	2	1	0	0	0-0
Ayers Jr.	2	0	0	0	1	0	0-0
Harrison	2	0	0	0	1	0	0-0
Irving	2	0	0	1	0	0	0-0
Colvin	2	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Coleman	2	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Long	2	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Kpassagnon	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Parker	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Addae	0	0	2	0	0	0	0-0
Quin	0	0	1	0	0	0	0-0
	71	3	7	4	2	1	0-0

Passing	Att	Cmp	Yds	25	In	Td	Sk	Rate
Brees	24	17	149	1	0	2	1	114.8
Winston	11	7	47	0	0	0	2	72.9
	35	24	196	1	0	2	3	101.6

Rushing	Att	Yds	Avg	FD	10	Lg	Td
Anderson	23	112	4.9	5	3	14	0
Foreman	9	59	6.6	6	3	19	0
Winston	2	14	7.0	0	1	12	0
Brees	2	3	1.5	0	0	2	0
	36	188	5.2	11	7	19	0

Receiving	No	Dp	Att	Yds	Avg	FD	25	Lg	Td
Kearse	6	0	6	37	6.2	1	0	9	0
Baldwin	6	0	9	72	12.0	4	1	34	1
Witten	4	0	8	19	4.8	0	0	9	0
Anderson	3	0	5	12	4.0	1	0	5	1
Everett	3	0	3	31	10.3	1	0	13	0
Moore	1	0	3	10	10.0	1	0	10	0
Foreman	1	0	1	15	15.0	1	0	15	0
	24	0	35	196	8.2	9	1	34	2

Defense	Tkl	Sk	Def	Stf	Hur	FF	Int
Clowney	8	1	1	2	0	1	0-0
Jones	7	2	0	1	0	0	0-0
Johnson,D	6	0	1	1	0	0	0-0
Gotsis	4	0	0	1	1	0	0-0
Jackson	4	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Heath	3	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Peko	3	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Dunlap	2	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Robinson	2	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Baker	2	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Lynch	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Williams	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Boston	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Berry	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
	45	3	2	5	1	1	0-0



TODD GURLEY II
COWTOWN

152 total yards – 101 receiving – 2
TDs on nifty catch-and-runs.

	Cowtown	Sebastian
First Downs	15	22
Rushes	24-51	36-188
Passes	16-21-226	24-35-196
Sacked	3-18	3-15
Fumble	1	1
Penalties	3-21	5-33
Turnovers	0	0
Missed Tackles	6	3
Dropped Passes	0	0
Bad Passes	1	0
Passes 25+	1	1
Runs 10+	0	7
Blitzers	31	25
Time	24:59	35:01
Third Down	5-11	5-15
Fourth Down	0-0	3-7
Red Att/Td/Fg	2/1/1	2/1/1
Net Offense	259	369



18

York



15

Toronto

TEAM LEADERS

Passing	Cmp	Att	Yds	TD
Brady	24	49	224	1
Rushing	Car	Yds	Avg	TD
Bernard	16	82	5.1	0
Receiving	Rec	Yds	Avg	TD
Walker	9	112	12.4	1

Team	1	2	3	4	OT	Total
York	0	3	0	12	3	18
Toronto	0	0	7	8	0	15

Play of the Game

9:14 in OT, 4th & 1 at Toronto 36. The Toronto defence keys on **Giovani Bernard** and slants the line in the direction of the run. Bernard follows a block from **Brandon Scherff** for an 11-yard gain.

TEAM LEADERS

Passing	Cmp	Att	Yds	TD
Cutler	16	19	178	2
Rushing	Car	Yds	Avg	TD
Barkley	19	47	2.5	0
Receiving	Rec	Yds	Avg	TD
Hill	7	70	11.7	1

EXCALIBURS CUT DOWN WOLVERINES IN O.T.!

GRAHAM GANO KICKS OFF YORK PLAYOFF RUN WITH 4 FIELD GOALS!

SUMMARY: The Wolverines wanted another shot at the Excaliburs after dropping a one-point decision to them on the road in Week Eight. A raucous crowd at the Wolverine's Den cheered them on, motivating the Toronto defence and creating a wall of distracting noise for **Tom Brady** and the York offence. The first four York possessions ended in punts. However, the Wolverines' offence fared worse; managing just 2 first downs in their first three series and turning the ball over on their fourth on a **Kevin Byard** tip and pick of **Jay Cutler**. That put York at the Toronto 29 and set up a 40-yard field goal by **Graham Gano** to open the scoring. Toronto's offensive woes continued. Trying to take advantage of their deepest penetration, Cutler went play-action long slant on 3rd & 1 at the York 30. But linebacker **Joe Schobert** sniffed out the fake and dumped Cutler for a 9-yard loss. The Swords responded with a time-consuming drive from their own 20 to the Toronto 9. But Gano hooked the easy field goal attempt to keep the differential at 3 points at halftime. Toronto started the 2nd half with a three-and-out, but the defence held off the Excaliburs again, setting up Toronto's first big break. **Tyreek Hill** ripped off a 49-yard punt return, setting up a five-play, 36-yard drive that ended with a 7-yard out pass from Cutler to Hill for the game's first TD. York answered with a scrappy 11-play drive for a field goal to make it 7-6. The Wolverines took over at their 25, but on the first play from scrimmage, Schobert forced a Cutler fumble and Byard pounced on it at the Toronto 26. Five plays later, Brady threaded the needle to **Delanie Walker**, who backed into the end zone for an 11-yard TD catch. The two-point convert attempt failed, making it 12-7, York. The Wolverines' offence sputtered again, while a 50-yard pass to Walker set up a FG to stretch York's lead to 8 points. Backs to the wall, Cutler completed a 28-yard pass to **Seth Roberts** on 3rd & 10 and a 30-yard long slant to **Adam Thielen** for a TD. **Saquon Barkley** ran in the two-pointer, tying the game and sending it into overtime. Toronto got the ball to start OT, but went backwards and had to punt. After an attempted flea-flicker fell incomplete, York ran the ball 11 straight times, including a back-breaking 11-yard run by **Giovani Bernard** on 4th & 1 at the 36, to set up the 43-yard game-winning field goal by Gano.

QUOTES: "Kind of an ugly game, but the kind of game we needed to play to win in their stadium. Crowd was loud and their defence played an inspired game. Our defence played really well but they still almost stole it from us at the end." – York coach, **Jay Hammond**.

"The moment was not too big for us – the game could have gone either way. I am disappointed, but nobody expected us to be here and we proved we belonged. That defence of theirs came prepared and when it looked like we had them, they made plays." – Toronto coach, **Ryan Preston**.

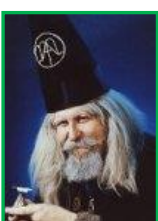


HAPPY FAN



titter

ANGRY FAN

**Merlin @MerlinRTchronicle**

Forsooth, it is a day to celebrate our defenders with ardor equal to that of Sir Brady and his Companions in this conquest over a worthy foe.

**Max 'Mini' Dood @M-DTorMoon**

Schobert's sack was the play of the game IMO. It sent a message to our offence that it could not do what had got them here in the first place.



Brady QB	Walker HB	Bernard RB KR

York 18 Toronto 15

	1	2	3	4	5	F
York	0	3	0	12	3	18
Toronto	0	0	7	8	0	15

Thielen WR	Hill WR PR	Trevathan ILB	

* Playoff * 02-07-2019 The Wolverine's Den Temp:29 Wind:0-10 *Internet* No Line MVP:Walker HFA:O

2	11:07	York	FG	Gano 40 (4-7-0:53)	3-0
3	6:24	Toronto	TD	Cutler 7 pass to Hill (Carlson) (5-36-2:52)	3-7
4	13:18	York	FG	Gano 26 (13-52-3:35)	6-7
4	10:53	York	TD	Brady 11 pass to Walker (2 - failed) (5-25-2:19)	12-7
4	2:45	York	FG	Gano 45 (10-66-3:55)	15-7
4	1:06	Toronto	TD	Cutler 30 pass to Thielen (2 - Barkley) (6-75-1:39)	15-15
5	6:04	York	FG	Gano 43 (13-41-7:21)	18-15

Player Stats

Passing	Att	Cmp	Yds	25	In	Td	Sk	Rate
Brady	49	24	224	1	0	1	2	68.8
	49	24	224	1	0	1	2	68.8

Rushing	Att	Yds	Avg	FD	10	Lg	Td
Bernard	16	82	5.1	3	2	19	0
Henry	17	54	3.2	3	0	9	0
Chubb	6	25	4.2	0	0	9	0
Brady	1	1	1.0	1	0	1	0
	40	162	4.1	7	2	19	0

Receiving	No	Dp	Att	Yds	Avg	FD	25	Lg	Td
Walker	9	0	11	112	12.4	6	1	50	1
Bernard	4	0	8	21	5.3	2	0	7	0
Richardson	3	0	5	26	8.7	2	0	11	0
Doctson	2	1	11	12	6.0	0	0	6	0
Ertz	2	0	6	24	12.0	2	0	12	0
Benjamin	1	0	1	13	13.0	1	0	13	0
Henry	1	0	1	6	6.0	0	0	6	0
Amendola	1	0	4	7	7.0	1	0	7	0
Chubb	1	0	1	3	3.0	0	0	3	0
	24	1	48	224	9.3	14	1	50	1

Fumbles	No	Rec	Td
Byard	0	1	0
	0	1	0

Kick Returns	No	Yds	Avg	Lg	Td
Bolden Jr.	2	24	12.0	13	0
	2	24	12.0	13	0

Punt Returns	No	Fc	Yds	Avg	Lg	Td
Amendola	3	3	30	10.0	15	0
	3	3	30	10.0	15	0

Kicking	FG	Lg	XP	Pts
Gano	4-5	45	0-0	12

Punting	No	Yds	Avg	Tb	20	Bk	Lg
Jones, D	7	326	46.6	0	2	0	54

Defense	Tkl	Sk	Def	Str	Hur	FF	Int
Timmons	13	0	0	2	0	0	0-0
Schobert	8	1	0	1	0	1	0-0
Hayes	6	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Johnson	5	1	1	1	1	0	0-0
Buckner	4	0	0	1	1	0	0-0
Dennard	3	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Douglas	3	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Byard	2	0	1	0	0	0	1-11
Miller, V	2	1	0	1	0	0	0-0
Alualu	2	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Cox	2	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Coleman	2	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Crawford	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Williams, M	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
O'Daniel	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Acho	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
	56	3	2	6	2	1	1-11

Passing	Att	Cmp	Yds	25	In	Td	Sk	Rate
Cutler	19	16	178	2	1	2	3	118.9
	19	16	178	2	1	2	3	118.9

Rushing	Att	Yds	Avg	FD	10	Lg	Td
Barkley	19	47	2.5	2	0	8	0
Murray	5	18	3.6	0	0	6	0
Hill	1	5	5.0	0	0	5	0
Cutler	6	2	0.3	0	0	3	0
	31	72	2.3	2	0	8	0

Receiving	No	Dp	Att	Yds	Avg	FD	25	Lg	Td
Barkley	6	0	6	28	4.7	1	0	8	0
Hill	6	0	8	70	11.7	5	0	19	1
Thielen	3	0	4	52	17.3	2	1	30	1
Roberts	1	0	1	28	28.0	1	1	28	0
	16	0	19	178	11.1	9	2	30	2

Fumbles	No	Rec	Td
Cutler	1	0	0
	1	0	0

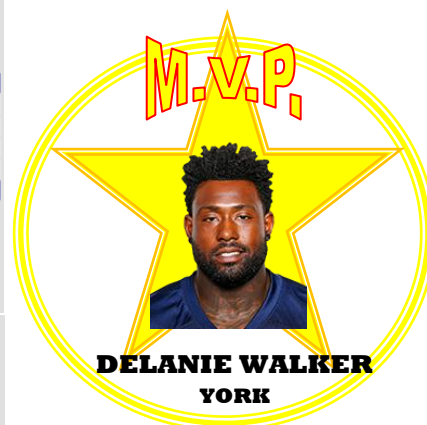
Kick Returns	No	Yds	Avg	Lg	Td
Harris	1	12	12.0	12	0
	1	12	12.0	12	0

Punt Returns	No	Fc	Yds	Avg	Lg	Td
Hill	6	0	63	10.5	49	0
	6	0	63	10.5	49	0

Kicking	FG	Lg	XP	Pts
Carlson	0-0	0	1-1	1

Punting	No	Yds	Avg	Tb	20	Bk	Lg
King	9	395	43.9	1	4	0	55

Defense	Tkl	Sk	Def	Str	Hur	FF	Int
Trevathan	17	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Poe	7	0	2	1	0	0	0-0
Bethel	7	0	2	0	0	0	0-0
Zettel	7	0	0	1	1	0	0-0
Smith	7	0	1	0	0	0	0-0
Carr	5	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Williams, S	4	0	1	0	0	0	0-0
Charlton	4	0	0	0	1	0	0-0
Weddle	3	0	2	0	0	0	0-0
Simon	2	1	0	0	0	0	0-0
Hunt	2	0	0	0	2	0	0-0
Williams, T	2	0	2	0	0	0	0-0
Ramsey	2	0	1	0	0	0	0-0
Vigil	2	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Walden	2	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Williams, S	1	1	0	0	0	0	0-0
Harmon	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Allen	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Bromley	0	0	1	0	0	0	0-0
	76	2	12	2	4	0	0-0



9 catches, 112 yards, 1 TD. Scored only TD and added big 50-yard catch late.

Team Stats

	York	Toronto
First Downs	22	12
Rushes	40-162	31-72
Passes	24-49-224	16-19-178
Sacked	2-11	3-19
Fumble	0	1
Penalties	6-37	4-29
Turnovers	0	2
Missed Tackles	5	7
Dropped Passes	1	0
Bad Passes	1	1
Passes 25+	1	2
Runs 10+	2	0
Blitzers	20	12
Challenges	0-1	1-1
Time	40:19	28:37
Third Down	7-22	1-11
Fourth Down	2-3	0-0
Red Att/Td/Fg	3/1/1	1/1/0
Net Offense	375	231



AROUND THE



With Spats McChad

NEW YORK – It was impossible to ignore the annoying fact that the 61st Grammy Awards were taking place immediately after the Pacific Conference Quarter Final match between the Cubs and the Triumph. The commercials saturated the network and the internet in the 24 hours leading up to the music industry's yearly ostentatious display of self-stimulation. The silver lining in the overhype was that I knew exactly when not to be tuned in to CBS.

My aversion to the Grammys and other self-congratulatory pontifical exercises, such as the Oscars, stems not from a lack of appreciation for music; but from a distaste for the rampant commercial exploitation of said commodity now permanently embedded in the industry. There was a time, back when the gramophone was being perfected (thus the name "Grammys"), when the industry at least partially served the music. Today, music serves the industry. The result is that the airwaves are clogged with soulless, factory-produced and not always cleverly disguised re-packaging of melodies, riffs and themes of songs from decades ago. These are delivered by electronically-enhanced "artists" mass-produced and engineered behind the scenes to captivate the masses with glamorous false images. These "stars" seem to come out of nowhere, already popular and accomplished, with the power of the mainstream media shoving their mass-produced drivel down our throats while propelling them to heights far greater than their talent justifies. Just look at Drake....

Curiously, I am frequently asked by my readers why I do not talk about music when offering my "pre-article" perspective on non-football topics. I generally avoid music debates as they are infinitely more pointless than debating who the best football player of all time is. Occasionally I can be drawn into the "Who's better: the Beatles or the Rolling Stones?" discussion, if I am sufficiently drunk. But if I were to attempt to offer an opinion on music to you in this forum it would undoubtedly provoke the type of strong, emotional and often unpleasant response that comes with such territory. There is a reason it is called the universal language; because it goes straight to the heart and past the brain. People take their music choices personally – and they tend to defend them like it's 4th and goal at the one-yard line.

So, what does it say about me that I have songs like Frank Zappa's '*Peaches En Regalia*,' '*I Ain't Hep to That Step But I'll Dig It*,' by Doris Day, '*Kai Tangata*' by Alien Weaponry, Chopin's '*Nocturne in E Minor*' and '*A National Acrobat*' by Black Sabbath all together in one of my favourite mixes? Do you think there is any point discussing music with me now? I think most of you will agree that there is no point – all except the Drake lovers out there. Bracing myself for the hate mail....

CHAH-JAH-POW-AH!

The Chargers would appear to be the most dubious no.1 conference seed in the league's history. Ranked 13th in the Power Rankings, with a starting quarterback rated near the bottom of the league leaders and the team as a whole ranked close to the top in just one statistical category – points allowed – the team's success on the football field remains an unsolved puzzle for many experts. Their success measured in victories is starkly at odds with the dispassionate naked eye that sees many of those victories as the lesser of two failures.

Chargers' fans, on the other hand, have it all figured out. The team's success is due to '*Charger Power*' – the secret energy that the fans channel into the players at key moments in the game to give them an extra boost; or direct like a hex at their opponents to cause apparently unforced blunders. (The Chargers did enjoy a +10-turnover differential in 2018 – 4th best in the league). While most effective at home in a live setting, this energy can be channeled through television sets onto the field, wherever situated, due to its supernatural properties.

'*Charger Power*' began as a slogan – a standard scoreboard call to the fans to make more noise. But as the team started piling up wins '*Charger Power*' took on a life of its own and, by the Quarter Final round of the post-season, had become a real thing in the minds of many fans and even the local media. '*CHA - JAH - POW - AH!*' the fans would bellow to the scoreboard prompts. A clap of thunder and the crackle of a lightning bolt would sound over the stadium PA at the syllable "*POW*."

By Week 16, the '*Charger Power*' chant and accompanying fan choreography had been refined to an art. '*Charger Power*' had been officially credited by Charger beat-reporter, **Thomas Jenifer**, with stopping the Bombers cold inside the red zone and forcing them to settle for a field goal with the Chargers leading 14-10 at the time. Bruxelles never got the ball back and the Chargers would eventually hang on for a 14-13 win, the one that clinched them the division.



Excaliburs place-kicker **Graham Gano** launches the game-winning field goal in overtime at the Wolverine's Den to lift York over Toronto 18-15 and advance to Conference Final.

In the playoffs, however, '*Charger Power*' was about to get its first serious test. Even '*Charger Power*' diehards agreed on that. The Convicts had been humiliated on their home field, 34-8, by St. Charles in Week Ten. It had been one of those smoke-and-mirrors scoreboard blowouts, where a punt return for a touchdown and 3 Chino turnovers – including a fumble returned for a touchdown by the defence – had overshadowed an otherwise tight struggle between the defences. Ironically, the Convicts were coming off a similar type of victory on the road over Bruxelles in the Wildcard round. If there was a team that could neutralize '*Charger Power*' with its own kind of felonious slight-of-hand, it was the Convicts. Not to mention the fact that **Dak Prescott** had eclipsed **Carson Wentz** in overall performance during the regular season, even challenging Wentz's accomplishments in the run game, with 412 yards and 8 rushing TDs. It was largely due to this and the general belief that the Chargers were a paper tiger, that the Convicts were favoured by 2 points on the road.

Charger coach, **Mike Martz** maintained an unwavering calmness in the face of media attempts to dig for a "Chargers-Feel-Disrespected" story angle. He dismissed the betting line as meaningless with an air of quiet confidence: "I don't pay any attention to that," he stated flatly. "It does not factor into our preparation and I know my players don't care about it – they know that every game is won or lost on the football field – not in an office somewhere in Vegas."

The equanimity of the Charger coach allowed Charger owner, **John Clingan**, to vent his spleen about Las Vegas odds-makers in his customary irascible manner: "They're idiots," he

spat. "You'd think the so-called experts would have figured by now out not to underestimate this team. This team is a family. We pull together and get it done!"

St. Charles Stadium is officially named the Charles County Waldorf-St.Charles-White Plains-Bennsville Amalgamated Sports Complex. It was shortened to St. Charles Stadium by local sports writers to avoid having to type the long form and after writers and editors struggled to get the initials CCWSTCWPBA Sports Complex right.

The facility is designed as a wide bowl that appears from the vantage point of the *Brylcreem Blimp* to be much larger than its actual 46,560 seat capacity. Its broad expanse and low profile once invited in the winds in an attempt to recreate the conditions of the Canadian Football League for its original intended tenants, the Baltimore Stallions. However, when **Art Modell** agreed to move the Cleveland Browns to Baltimore and the Stallions folded, the community was left with a large stadium and no tenants. The County rented it out to school boards and, for two years, to the Catholic Cardinals Division 3 college football team from Washington DC. However, it remained mostly vacant and fell into a state of quasi disrepair. With the award of an EFL franchise, owner **John Clingan** partnered with the Maryland Stadium Authority to refurbish it and build up the top of the bowl with luxury boxes and expanded press facilities, creating a vertical wall at the top edge of the bowl that acts as additional shelter against the elements. This project earned him a healthy rebate on the rent and the initials "C.P." (standing for Clingan Products Ltd) were added to the stadium's official name.

In a community hungry for football, the Chargers have not struggled to draw a crowd in their three years of existence. But the surprising success of the team on the field in 2018 resulted in a string of five straight home sellouts beginning in Week Nine and stoked a fan spirit that, by season's end, rivalled that of the historically crazy crowds in Chino, Twin Cities and Pickering. '*Charger Power*' energized the fans who in turn energized the players. '*Charger Power*' was at the center of the perfect symbiotic fan-team relationship.

The playoff atmosphere amped up '*Charger Power*' to dangerous levels, however. This was apparent on the Charger's first drive, coming after the defence had forced a game-opening three-and-out by the Chino offence. Wentz was intense almost to the point of madness. His eyes blazed crazy as he barked signals at a high pitch that pierced the crowd noise and carried up to the broadcast booth. He zinged passes of 17 and 10 yards in to **Michael Thomas** and **Jimmy Graham** that knocked them off balance. An electrified **Dalvin Cook** shot out of the gate for runs of 7 and 16 yards on his first 2 carries. Suddenly the Chargers were at the Chino 10-yard line and the crowd was on its feet. After a quick huddle the maniacal Wentz jogged to the line. The ball was snapped quickly and he took three short, stabby steps backwards. Without pausing to set his feet, he fired the ball up the middle toward Thomas at the goal line, but the pass went into the arms of **Trumaine Johnson** instead. The Chino corner slid to the ground for a touchback.

Silence struck St. Charles Stadium like a clap of thunder; as if the entire venue had been short-circuited. Metaphorically, it

had. The Chino defence had, in an instant, diverted the energy away from the home team. But the “power” would soon be restored following the obligatory network commercial break.

An uncomfortable-looking **Dak Prescott** walked onto the field to boisterous chants of ‘*CHA - JAH - POW - AH!*’ and the crack of lightning and sizzle of electricity sound effects pumping over the stadium PA system. The wall of sound was a physical presence at the line of scrimmage. The Convicts started with a “safe” play – a run off left tackle by **Mark Ingram** for 4-yards. But **Nate Solder** was flagged for holding, pushing them back 10 yards. Ingram got 9 of those yards back on a sweep to the right, but a clearly agitated Prescott mis-fired to **Christian McCaffery** in the flat on the next play to bring up 3rd & 11.

The third-and-long was red meat for the Charger crowd. Waving their foam lightning bolts and screaming ‘*CHA - JAH - POW - AH!*’ at the top of their lungs they created a discomfiting sonic turbulence that appeared to rattle the young Convict QB. Prescott dropped back and stared down field, his feet lightly dancing beneath him. He started to throw, stopped, then abruptly flung the ball down the center of the field in the general direction of two Convicts receivers. But the ball never reached either of his intended targets. **Ahkello Witherspoon** – an extra DB playing zone coverage in the middle – reached up and tipped the ball in the air. The wobbly spheroid seemed to hang suspended for a split-second longer than natural law would normally allow before falling back into his arms. Witherspoon clutched the ball to his chest and took off for a 23-yard return to the Convicts’ 8-yard line.

If the stadium had been loud before, it was fully thunderous following the interception and continued its sonorous assault up until the Charger offence gathered for the huddle. At that point, the sellout crowd turned dialed down the volume as if of one mind, offering restrained encouragement instead of frantic pressure. A more sober-looking Wentz strode to the line and handed the ball off to **Dion Lewis**. But the Convicts were waiting for him. **Sheldon Rankins** swallowed him up 3-yards behind the line of scrimmage. A pass to **Kendall Wright** on second down was obstructed by **Trumaine Johnson** bringing up third-and-goal at the 11-yard line. The Chargers fanned out four wide receivers while the Convicts flooded the field with seven defensive backs. Somehow, Wentz was able to find the open man in the swirling crowd of jerseys, hitting **Roger Lewis** across the middle of the end zone for a touchdown.

The crowd erupted in a frenetic display of disorganized jubilation. ‘*Charger Power*,’ as a ritual, was temporarily suspended as the fans savoured the fruits of its power and just bellowed their joy. The touchdown that should have been scored on their first series was now in the books; while the failure of Johnson’s end zone interception of Wentz to spark a surge by the Chino offence would have a subtle effect on Prescott’s composure and the Convicts’ execution the rest of the day.

This change was apparent on Chino’s next series, a long, drawn-out affair requiring 15 plays to cover 68 yards. Two attempts by a clearly skittish Prescott to go deep were aborted early by checking down to his outlets for minimal gain. He was quick to run rather than switch to secondary reads, although one scramble did result in a third-down conversion to keep the drive alive. The big play of the drive was a 20-yard screen to McCaffery, which was a masterpiece of point-of-attack blocking. A good tackle by safety **Ron Parker** saved a touchdown on the play. Eventually the Convicts found the end zone on a 2-yard dive by **Ronald Jones** to tie the game. It was a gritty display given that the Charger defence had not laid down for them and the crowd had resumed its organized sonic assault on the visitors. But it would become clear, in retrospect, that that effort would be the best that a jet-lagged Convicts’ offence could do against such an energized opponent.

The Charger offence was no better. As in the Week Ten match-up between these teams, the defences remained largely in control. But in keeping with the magic of ‘*Charger Power*,’ the St. Charles’ offence’s few big moments were really big and devastating for Chino morale. **Dion Lewis** turned an unassuming off tackle run into a 48-yard touchdown, sprinting virtually untouched to the end zone for a sudden 14-7 lead. **Matt Kalil** didn’t even have to lay a block on the play as his opponent, **Takkarist McKinley** pulled off an inside pass rush move only to find there was no passer to rush.

The response by the Chino offence was feeble. An attempt to recreate the earlier success of the McCaffery screen resulted in a 3-yard loss and a punt. There would be no more highlights – only drudgery – for the remainder of the first half.

While the energy of ‘*Charger Power*’ crackled in the stands to start the second half, the opposing offences showed no promise of breaking out of their funks. St. Charles went three-and-out to start the third quarter, while veteran **Julius Peppers** knocked the Convicts out of a briefly blooming rhythm on their first possession by dragging Prescott to the turf for a 7-yard loss. Soon, **Tess Way** ambled onto the field. His fourth punt of the day was a high, 47-yard picture of punting perfection that **Travis Benjamin** fielded inside his team’s 20-yard line as the Chino special teams converged at high speed, **Duke Ejiofor** leading the way.

What followed was another ‘*Charger Power*’ moment. The crowd braced for the anticipated high-speed impact of Ejiofor smacking into an oblivious Benjamin, who had not signalled for a fair catch despite being a sitting duck. As luck would have it, the ball tailed slightly as it reached him, forcing a last second twisting of his body to secure the ball. That tiny movement coming at that precise instant was enough to alter the entire dynamic. Ejiofor had totally committed to the huge hit in a bid to force a turnover. But Benjamin had turned at the exact moment that he was about lay the lumber on him. The result was a glancing blow that had no practical effect. Benjamin brushed it off and sprinted up the suddenly vacant middle lane as the containment on either side skidded past him in the opposite direction.

“He *missed* him! Benjamin has room up the middle...he gets a block at the 25...there he goes! He has Way to beat...he cuts back at the 45...nobody’s going to catch him...*CHAH - JAH - POW - AH!* He’s in for the Charger touchdown!” bellowed **Chuck “The Electric Eye” Priest**, Charger play-by-play announcer on ‘The Team 980 AM.’

“Rob Nazar on the Chino sideline can’t believe it, Chuck,” guest colour commentator, **Delbert Cowsette** chimed in. “It looked like the Convicts had him back there. I don’t know what happened, the Chino coverage don’t know what happened, heck, I don’t think Travis Benjamin know what happened there! It was like <zap!> out of nowhere and he’s gone for a touchdown.”

“And the crowd is loving it, Delbert!” Priest replied. “Listen to them cheer! It’s an appreciative crowd here at CP St. Charles Stadium, as they should be; this team has the Charger Power humming right now!”

The Benjamin punt return touchdown was the pivotal play of the game; if the Convicts were on thin ice before, they were certainly flailing in the water after it. Trailing 21-7, still in the 3rd quarter, they went for it on 4th & 16 at the Charger 44 – a questionable decision at best. Determined to get on the stat sheet, **Yannick Ngakoue** defeated a double-team and dumped the Chino QB 10-yards behind the line of scrimmage, knocking the ball loose in the process. Prescott recovered, but it did not matter. The Chargers took over on downs on the Chino side of mid-field. They did not have to go far for **Steven Hauschka** to nail a field goal from 51-yard to make the score 24-7.

I will give the Convicts this: they never gave up throughout a fourth quarter of utter futility. But the Charger defence played with a zeal and a unity that the disoriented Chino offence could not handle with over 46,000 deranged Charger fans bellowing at the top of their lungs. ‘Charger Power’ withered them down with every snap.

“They wanted it more,” a morose Coach Nazar commented to reporters in a very short post-game presser. “Their players and their fans. And we made too many mistakes. I thought, like the last game, that we played them close but the breaks went their way.”

Mike Martz, like most professional winning coaches, had mastered the art of talking at length while saying nothing remotely controversial or particularly interesting. His post-game presser of over 15 minutes can be summarized as follows: ‘they played well; we played well; we won as a team; they lost as a team; I’m happy, but our work is far from done.’

Owner **John Clingan** offered more candid insight into the true precarious nature of the Charger win. “I thought our defence played lights out today,” he declared, starting out on a rare positive note. “But our offence has to be able to control the ball more than it did. I thought the fans played better today than our offence did, to tell you the truth!”

In an era when football analysis is overwhelmingly driven by statistics, the Charger win defies explanation. A glance at the team statistics without a concurrent glance at the scoreboard would likely lead 9 out of 10 random observers to conclude that the Convicts had won the game. That one who might have guessed at a Charger victory would logically presume it had been a close score. But the Chargers won by 20 points. It wasn’t even close.

If this had happened just once, it could be written off as a fluke. But this has been the way of the Chargers’ season for the most part. Until somebody smarter than me comes up with a more scientific explanation for the Chargers’ success, I’m sticking with ‘Charger Power.’

GREEN KNIGHT VERSUS BLUE KNIGHT

While the Chargers were striking a blow for the disrespected everywhere, another graduate of the Expansion Class of 2016 was preparing to teach the haters a lesson. The Wolverines had upset the natural order of things by knocking off two-time EFL Champion Aurora for the South Division title. While the Chargers’ success had surprised many pundits, the Wolverines’ achievement had absolutely shocked most; so much so that some, such as **Peter Prince** – whose conceit as the approved authority had been seriously wounded – were still coming to grips with it and struggling at the last minute to do some real research on the team they had not expected to make it to Prime Time.

Being expansion brothers and underdogs was where the similarities between Toronto and St. Charles ended, however. Unlike the Chargers, the Wolverines had some star power to help explain their position. **Jalen Ramsey** and **Eric Weddle** had both made First Team All-Pro and were neck-and-neck in the running for Defensive MVP. Top rookie **Saquon Barkley** had rushed for 1,041 yards while the wide receiver duo of **Adam Thielen** and **Tyreek Hill** had combined for 143 catches and 21 touchdowns. **Jay Cutler**, a previously troubled talent, had been miraculously reborn and smiled frequently for the cameras.

But the Wolverines also had some serious, many thought fatal, deficiencies. The offensive line was patchwork at best, while the defensive line was an unimpressive collection of undeveloped young talent and journeymen. Their linebacker corps showed more promise, but were injury-prone. If any of their starters on offence had gone down, the team would have been in serious trouble as there was nobody of note behind them. The tight end position had been the least productive in the league, with three players combining for a total of 15 catches for a 6.5-yard average.

All of this put together made the Wolverines a dangerous team, but not a playoff team in any sober, conventional analysis. But clever game-planning by coach **Ryan Preston** combined with a league-leading +22 turnover differential had turned conventional analysis on its head. The Wolverines were “for real,” in their own minds at least, and that meant they were a force to contend with.

The Excaliburs had already contended with the Wolverines this year and had come out on top in a one-point victory at home that could have gone either way. Like with so much of the Excaliburs’ success this year, it had been **Tom Brady** who had made the difference in that game; throwing 2 touchdowns with no interceptions and posting a 120.9 passer rating against a Toronto pass defence that had, incredibly, held opposing passers to an average passer rating of 50.1, the lowest posted by a defence since the Patriots of 2008 held opponents to a 50.7 rating. For the first time in a long time, Brady was living up to his perennial all-star billing and getting the most out of his weapon set.

The quarterbacks on both sides of this fight received most of the pre-game attention – participating in a promotional video-shoot as the *Green Knight* (Brady) versus the *Blue Knight* (Cutler) on the site of the former *Medieval Times Restaurant & Tournament* grounds adjacent to the Wolverine's Den. The media story angle sought to portray Brady as the established star and future hall-of-famer attempting to deny Cutler his likely-to-be last shot at the stardom many experts still believed his talent warranted. But it turned out to be a game where the defences on both sides dictated the pace of play. The narrative shifted from which of these two quarterbacks would take charge, to which one would survive intact the crushing defences of their opponents.

Play opened with the teams combining for seven straight punts. The longest drive in the group had been 43 yards. The first break came on the first play of Toronto's fourth possession. **Kevin Byard** batted a pass over the middle from Cutler intended for **Adam Thielen** and snatched his own deflection out of the air for an interception and 11-yrd return to the Toronto 29. But all this yielded was a 40-yard **Graham Gano** field goal. York had broken the ice and it was thick.

After three more punts, the Excaliburs got into a rhythm, but it was at the tempo of a funeral march. It took Brady 16 plays, with the longest a pass of 12 yards to **Zach Ertz**, to cover the 71 yards from their own 20 to the Toronto 9. But the effort would come to naught. **Jay Bromley** tipped Brady's pass at the line on 3rd & 9 and Gano badly hooked the 27-yard chip shot to keep the score at 3-0 for York going into halftime.

The fans at the Wolverine's Den were restless. The Toronto offence had been terrible during the first half. The York defenders had game-planned to stop the run and had been effective, limiting Barkley to 30 yards on 9 carries. Coach **Ryan Preston** counted on the run to set up the deadly play-action long pass to **Tyreek Hill**. So far that play had earned them one completion for a pedestrian 19 yards. The other attempts had resulted in failure, including a 9-yard sack by **Joe Schobert** that had knocked them out of field goal range in their sole penetrating drive of the first half. York coverage in the secondary had been disciplined and it was obvious that the Toronto offensive line could not stand up for long to a concerted pass rush. Cutler had thrown one unforced interception already. His history of playoff failure sat at the back of everyone's mind.

The home team's big break came in the 6th minute of the 3rd quarter on the 12th punt of the game. Hill put his speed and shiftiness on display with a 49-yard punt return that for a split second looked like it would go the distance. But a shoestring tackle by long-snapper **Morgan Cox** saved a touchdown. Buoyed by the big play the Wolverines did not waste the opportunity. Fittingly, Hill finished off the job, catching two passes from Cutler for 15 and 7 yards, the second in the end zone for the game's first touchdown. The *Blue Knight* had drawn first blood.

The score finally unleashed the crowd. Slashing sounds played over the stadium PA while the throng bellowed the *Howl of the Wolverine* at the top of their throats. This was sort of a guttural, sharp growl that sounded like a bit like old car engine revving up. *'RAR-RAR-RAR-RAR-RAR-RAR-RAR-RAR!'* Wolverines fans were not typical of Toronto sports fandom. A cap had been placed on corporate seating and tickets for good seats were reasonably priced. The crowd was younger and livelier and had amongst them a sizeable number of Toronto FC fans, who brought a touch of benign hooliganism to the atmosphere.

The game's first touchdown did not prompt a shift in York offensive strategy, however. While the Toronto defence stepped up on the next series with a stuff and a sack on the first two plays from scrimmage; when the Excaliburs got the ball back after a subsequent Toronto three-and-out they continued to plod forward methodically, using short passes and off tackle runs to wear down the Toronto line. The result was a 52-yard drive and a 26-yard Gano field goal to narrow the Toronto lead to 7-6.

Disaster struck for Toronto on their next possession. Trying to take advantage of the first-down run-stopping posture of the York defence, Cutler attempted to go airborne on the first play, but his receivers were covered. He took off running only to be nailed hard by Schobert from behind. The ball came out and Byard (who already had an interception to his credit) pounced on it at the Toronto 25. After a Brady sneak on 3rd & inches brought up a new set of downs at the Toronto 14, the *Green Knight* soon delivered a stab to the mid-rift with a short hitch to **Delanie Walker**, who backed into the end zone for an 11-yard touchdown catch for a 12-7 lead. The failure to complete the two-point conversion attempt was small comfort for the deflated Wolverine faithful. In a game where touchdowns were few and far between and they had not yet come in range for a field goal, a 5-point lead seemed big.

Nothing the Wolverines attempted on their next series worked as intended. They somehow still managed to gain a first down when **DeForst Buckner** jumped offside during a 4th & 2 punt. But they would have to punt again four plays later. The York defence had Toronto bottled up and there did not appear to be anything Coach Preston's offence could do about it.

But things were far from desperate yet. The Swords were backed up at their own 7-yard line after a holding penalty on **Kolton Miller**. Field position was a big factor and the Wolverines looked to exploit their advantage to the max as they held York in a 2nd & 17 hole. It was a good time then for Brady and Walker to join forces to pull off the play-of-the-game on offence for the Swords. While being pushed back by a determined Toronto pass rush, Brady threw a medium hitch as he backpedaled to his tight end Walker. Safety, **Shawn Williams** missed a tackle and Walker was free to roam, finally being tackled by **Danny Trevathan** after a gain of 50 yards. The York offence resumed their plodding pace, moving into field goal range and hoping to put the game away with a touchdown or by running out the clock. With time ticking away, the Wolverine defence dug deep to put an end to the drive and hold the Swords to a 45-yard field goal. There was now 2:45 left with the home team trailing by 8 points, 15-7.

Toronto took over at their 25. The way their offence had been misfiring, it really would take a miracle to get them back in the game. With dogged determination born of desperation, the until now feeble Toronto offence flexed its survival muscles. Cutler fired a perfect strike to **Seth Roberts** for a 28-yard gain on 3rd & 10. The blocking had held up, giving Cutler plenty of time. It was a

confidence booster and suddenly the Wolverines were in high gear. Thielen laid out for a 9-yard catch and Barkley managed to snare a ball tipped at the line for 8-yards more to the York 30. Riding the wave of good fortune, Coach Preston decided to go for it. He sent Thielen deep and held back the tight end to block. **Von Miller** came on the blitz but was taken out by **Jermaine Gresham** as Cutler launched a missile down the seam. Thielen caught the ball on the run and did not slow down he rest of the way for a 30-yard touchdown catch. With almost equal effortlessness, Barkley ran in untouched for the two-point conversion. The Toronto offence had saved its best for the do-or-die moment and, miraculously, had tied the game. The crowd at the Wolverine's Den went berserk.

The Wolverines held off a late push by Brady, sending the game into overtime. Their good fortune continued with a win of the coin toss. An ear-splitting roar of approval exploded from the stands. The home sideline and the crowd felt infused with the intoxicating rush of 'Destiny.' But just as the game was shaping up to be an iconic early chapter in the budding playoff history of the Toronto franchise, the balloon burst. Or, more accurately, the air was slowly let out of it.

The team that all year had shown an uncanny knack for knowing exactly when to press its advantage, and had just sent the York defence reeling with a 75-yard touchdown drive in the final two minutes, suddenly lost its nerve. Taking over at their own 25 after a touchback to kickoff overtime, the Wolverines went decidedly conservative. Twice they ran the ball with Barkley into a York defence that was waiting for him. Barkley was stuffed for 1 and 3-yard losses. On 3rd & 13, they tried to set up a screen instead of sending receivers to the marker. The Excaliburs did not blitz and Schobert wrapped him up after a 2-yard gain. The crowd groaned. The only worse outcome would have been a turnover.

The punt from **Marquette King** was unreturnable, but traveled only 43 yards before it was fair caught by **Danny Amendola** at the York 34. The Excaliburs attempted to deliver the death stroke on the first play with a bit of trickery. Brady handed off to **Derrick Henry**, who took a step forward before pitching it back to Brady. He heaved the ball downfield toward **Josh Doctson** but **Trevor Williams** had perfect coverage and pass fell incomplete. The flea-flicker had failed but the bold move put the Toronto defence on notice that it could not commit fully to stopping the run.

And running the ball was all that the York offence did after that. 11 straight handoffs to three different running backs pushed the ball forward, 70's style, closer and closer toward the Toronto goal line. But the Wolverines eventually caught on and it looked like the Swords were finally going to be stopped at the Toronto 36-yard line. Facing 4th & 1 and the prospect of either trying a 54-yard game-winning field goal or going to the first down, Coach **Jay Hammond** assessed his options. He risked giving the ball back to the Wolverines on downs, but the way his defence had been playing for most of the day it was worth the risk to put Gano in a better position. He elected to go for it.

His decision turned out to be pivotal. With the Wolverine defence in full run-stop mode, all eyes on **Giovani Bernard**, Brady pitched left to his running back. With right guard **Russell Bodine** pulling and **Brandon Scherff** leading the way a big hole was blasted open on the right side of the Toronto line. Bernard darted through it for the first down and much more. He was finally pulled to the turf by **Danny Trevathan** after an 11-yard gain.

"Big hole on the left side! Bernard has the first down and more! He's tackled by Trevathan at the 25, but not before he gets York a new set of downs!" play-by-play announcer **Bill Mimes** cried in excitement. "That was a huge play, Phil!"

"What we just saw was the York offensive line imposing its will on the Toronto defensive line, Bill" colour commentator, **Phil Mimms** remarked. "It was a well-designed play executed to perfection and now they are well inside Graham Gano's field goal range. I don't expect to see another pass from Brady on this series!"

Mimms was correct. Brady handed the ball off three more times, which netted them 5 more yards, before Gano took the field to attempt the game-winner from 43 yards.

"They're sending in the field goal unit," Mimes observed. "This kick will be for a berth in the Conference Final."

"This is by no means a sure thing, Bill," Mimms cautioned. "Remember, Gano hooked one earlier in the game from in close. The Wolverines will be coming after him with everything they've got."

Perhaps guarding against the block attempt, Gano's kick was high. It started down the middle but began drifting to the right as it descended. End-over-end it tumbled, veering toward the right upright. Suddenly at the last moment it curled back and passed inside the pole and over the bar. The umpire raised his arms, signalling that the kick was good. Gano jumped in the air and hugged **Donnie Jones**, his holder. It was his fourth field goal of the game and the biggest kick of his EFL career.

Despite the disappointing ending, the fallout for Coach Preston was not severe. Against a seasoned and talented York squad, the Wolverines had been clearly over-matched in the trenches on both sides of the ball. His team had still pushed a more complete, and experienced, York team into overtime before falling. Asked about his decision to run the ball at the start of overtime, Preston seemed chagrined at his miscalculation, but still defended it.

"It's easy to say I shouldn't have run those plays now that we know they didn't work," Preston explained with a hint of sarcasm in his post-game presser. "But at the time I felt if we were going to get a big play out of Saquon, it was going to be after Jay had just passed the ball successfully against them. Looking back, maybe letting Jay loose would have worked out better. But maybe they pick him off and run it back for 6. Just saying..."

In truth, getting his team this far was a feather in Preston's cap and the local media knew it. They gave him an easy ride.

On the other side, **Jay Hammond** had done his homework and, except for that last-minute Toronto touchdown drive, his defence had delivered in stellar, shutdown fashion. His hall-of-fame quarterback had played like one against the best pass defence in the league. There was not much to complain about. In a rare lengthy press conference, Hammond was magnanimous.

“Great game. Tough teams. Big plays,” he declared in his trademark two-syllable sentences. “Walker, Brady, Joe! Hey, Joe, big piece. Huge piece. Graham...big kick. Huge kick. Big win. Huge win!”

When asked what he thought was the key play of the game, Hammond became much more expansive than was his custom.

“All of them! All those plays matter,” he stated, his eyes intense and shining under the peak of his green ball cap. “Football is game of plays, man. You can’t just take one. If you take one, you gotta take ‘em all. I liked Delanie’s 50-yarder though. That was cool and we needed it at the time!”

In a season without a clear post-season favourite, with the no. 1 and no.2 seeds in the conference out of the picture, the red hot Excaliburs are as close to a true favourite as we have in the Atlantic Conference.

THE OTHER TWO GAMES

It was not my intention to give the other two Quarter Finals match-ups short shrift. But I admit that I was so fascinated with the paths of the two teams from the 2016 expansion class that I fixated on them. Now, due to space limitations that I have already exceeded, I will run through what you need to know about the impressive Cowtown and Twin Cities victories:

In Minneapolis, the Triumph ended the Cubs’ win streak and their season with a cold-pressed 27-19 victory to advance to the Pacific Conference Final. The Cubs landed their best shot early – a 78-yard slant from **Russell Wilson** to **Mike Wallace** for a touchdown on the third snap of the game. They followed that up with a **Justin Tucker** field goal, after the defence shut down Twin Cities’ first possession, to take a 10-0 lead. Considering that the Cubs had only scored 9 points in the entire game back in a Week Five loss to the Triumph, the fast start boded well for **Deron Redding**’s team. But his counterpart on the opposite sideline did not panic. **Guy Williams** set about executing his game plan with the kind of steely nerve we have come to expect from the coach whose burning desire to win makes **Vince Lombardi** look like a pussy by comparison.

The Triumph game plan consisted of repeated doses of running back **Melvin Gordon** on the ground mixed with short passes to Gordon and **James White** coming out of the back field. **Royce Freeman** made the occasional appearance to keep Gordon from coughing up a lung; he wound up scoring the go-ahead touchdown in the second quarter to give the Triumph a lead they would never relinquish. **Antonio Brown** served as a diversion, receiving only 3 targets and catching all of them, including a 16-yard TD in the third quarter. It was a well-designed strategy that minimized the impact of the Cubs’ biggest asset on defence – their secondary – while attacking its weakest point – their linebackers. But the offensive strategy also benefitted from the lack of a discernible defensive strategy by the Cubs to counter it. A review of *Total 22* shows little variety in the Cubs’ defensive formations and a markedly conservative, bordering on passive, posture. The Triumph defence, on the other hand, was not afraid to take chances. They got burned occasionally, but their dogged determination to contain the Cubs’ run game eventually bore fruit in forcing Wilson to attempt ball control through the short passing game. By the fourth quarter, defensive back **Bradley Roby** had the Cubs’ approach figured out and jumped a quick out route for an interception that turned the game irrevocably in the Triumph’s favour.

The enthusiasm of the sellout crowd at Wilhalla Stadium contrasted sharply with the clinical, workmanlike approach of the Triumph players on the field. **Antonio Brown**’s simulated sex act with the football following his touchdown notwithstanding, the Triumph were basically all business. The Cubs, on the other hand, wilted in the red zone, unable to push home drives and were forced to settle for field goals. The frustration showed in their slumping demeanour and the franticness of their coach on the sidelines. Needless to say, Redding’s playoff troubles are landing him in more hot water with beat writer **Archibald Thacker** and are likely to invigorate the ‘Dump Deron’ movement in Iowa City.

At The Fish Tank in Sebastian, Cowtown “back-up” quarterback **Jimmy Garoppolo** continued to garner headlines with another stellar playoff performance in a 31-17 upset of the Swordfish. Garoppolo threw 3 touchdown passes to add to his playoff-leading total of 8 in two games. Two of those went to running back **Todd Gurley II**, who now has 3 TD catches in two games and more yards receiving (158) than rushing (100) in the playoffs. Cowtown’s star running back has looked more dangerous as a receiver than as a runner so far in the post-season, mostly due to teams focusing on stopping the Cowtown run game, which the Swordfish defence did with much success in this game. But while such an approach might have been a winning formula against the ageing and inconsistent **Joe Flacco**; against the quick draw and keen downfield vision of Garoppolo, it was an invitation. The Cowtown QB was not gaudily prolific – just 226 yards passing overall – but he was precise, completing 16 of 21 attempts with no interceptions.

While the national media heaped accolades on Garoppolo and Gurley and loudly sang the praises of “unsung hero” **Mike Evans**, who caught the other Garoppolo TD pass, few paid any attention to the crucial difference-maker in this contest; the Cowtown defence. That’s somewhat understandable; they yielded 22 first downs, surrendered 369 total yards, allowed 7 runs of 10 yards or more and failed to generate a turnover. But on third and fourth down, when it really mattered, they came up big, repeatedly thwarting one of the cornerstones of Sebastian’s formula for offensive success: the bold 4th down conversion gambit.

Russ Lemmon uses the fourth down as a weapon. For him, it is often just another opportunity to gain a first down and demoralize, frustrate and tire out his opponent in the process. But the weapon mostly backfired this week. Two stops on 4th & short ended drives in Cowtown territory, both at the 35. More critically, a stop on 4th & 4 at the Sebastian 36 was a gift that led to a Cowtown field goal and a 23-10 lead in the third quarter. But despite shooting themselves in the foot more than once, the Fish might still have won if not for a 71-yard kickoff return by **Matthew Dayes** in the 4th quarter, coming off a clutch Sebastian TD drive, that led to Gurley’s second TD catch of the game and a 29-17 lead. It turned out to be a back-breaker. s **Mike Hilton** safety rounded out the scoring in deceptively lop-sided 31-17 final. The Fish looked like the stronger team in many ways, but the Corn Kings under Garoppolo looked much more poised. This should be a cause for great concern in York, where an equally poised **Tom Brady** awaits.

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PACIFIC CONFERENCE FINAL

TWIN CITIES @ ST. CHARLES (line – Pick 'Em)

INJURIES: Twin Cities – Kenny Golladay (OUT), Tyler Eifert (OUT); St. Charles – None.

The Chargers are hosting the Pacific Conference Finals and nobody, including me, can definitively explain how they got here. Getting two shots at Buffalo helps, but it was not a game-changer in securing a playoff berth, as New Jersey can attest. The mystery is no closer to being solved after they dispatched the Convicts with apparent ease in the quarter final round. I say “apparent” because the 20-point margin of victory suggests so. But the other numbers tell a different story, one in which the Chargers had to resort to the running game in order to take the pressure off their skittish young quarterback during those precious few moments when they had the ball. The Convicts held the pigskin 11 minutes longer and seemed to control the pace of play throughout. But a pair of huge defensive plays, a special teams touchdown and the ability of the defence to put Dak Prescott in 3rd and long situations then shut the door on him turned the tide so decisively in the Chargers’ favour that the game had the feel of a low-grade blowout. It was a typical St. Charles victory – a competitive *tour de force*, if not a statistical one. So, if competitiveness and tenacity in defending the red zone defines the Chargers’ march to the no.1 seed, they will be well-matched here against a Twin Cities team that defines its essence as competitive spirit. There is talent in the Triumph locker room, of course, but the way in which it is wielded, combined with the unyielding will of the team’s coach, usually spells over-achievement and winning results. There are limits to the miracles that both these teams are capable of, however. Guy Williams was unable to game plan his way out of the competitive hole that having Mitch Trubisky and CJ Beathard at quarterback created. Nor was John Clingan able to find the secret to unlocking the high-end potential of Carson Wentz. A half-speed Wentz meant the defence had to work that much harder to keep games close enough to salvage on the leg of the league’s most prolific field goal kicker, Steven Hauschka. But a bundle of field goals is unlikely to be enough punch to knockout one of the stingiest defences in the league this time. The Triumph not only rate at the top of the charts on paper, they perform at that high level as well. Tied for no.1 in efficiency defending the run – at 3.3 yards-per-carry – the likes of Bobby Wagner and Jurrell Casey will make the going tough for Frank Gore and Dion Lewis. This will force Wentz to attempt to stretch the field, where pick-artist Darius Slay, opportunistic Sean Davis and ambusher Kwon Alexander lay in wait for the slightest errant throw. The pressure will be on Michael Thomas to get open on a regular basis or risk mad scrambles, sacks or – at worst – interceptions going back the other way from his quarterback. But if Wentz can evade the pass rush in those situations and successfully extend and make plays using his legs, he could succeed in frustrating and tiring out the Triumph defence. Even the best defences become vulnerable when they get frustrated and tired. On the other side of the ball, veteran Carson Palmer will likely remain unfazed in the face of an underrated but effective St. Charles pass rush led by the fierce Yannick Ngakoue and the impressive rookie linebacker, Darius Leonard. He knows he has one of the league’s elite receivers in Antonio Brown going up against second-year starter, Adoree’ Jackson at corner; as well as the league’s most productive running tandem of Melvin Gordon and Royce Freeman behind him. Guarding his blind side, left tackle Russell Okung may not be a pro-bowler, but he is no pushover either. It was a fateful game when these teams met each other in Week 13. The Chargers won on a Hauschka field goal as time expired, his fifth three-pointer of the game. The outcome eventually determined the no.1 seed in the conference as the Chargers took the honours on the first three-way tie-breaker. It was another game where the Chargers were outgained and appeared on many levels to be outplayed. But a pair of picks, a blocked punt, timely sacks (including a safety) and 9 penalties against the Triumph were enough to negate their shortcomings on the stat sheet and prevail on the scoresheet. Expect Twin Cities to stick closely to the same game plan, however, minus the turnovers, while possibly adding a few more screens to slow down the Chargers’ pass rush. The Chargers will be happy to repeat their somewhat pedestrian but error-free offensive performance as well. So, this will be another close game and a virtual roll of the dice to determine the victor. I am betting the Triumph get luckier this time. **PICK: TWIN CITIES**

ATLANTIC CONFERENCE FINAL

COWTOWN @ YORK (line – CORN KINGS by 2)

INJURIES: **Cowtown** – None; **York** – Leon Hall (QUESTIONABLE), Sidney Jones (OUT).

It is highly unusual for a visiting wild card to be favoured over a home division winner this deep into the playoffs, but the action in Vegas indicates that the momentum card is in play here as the high-flying Corn Kings soar into the Conference Finals for the first time in franchise history. After stumbling through a 2-4 finish that lost them the North Division and nearly knocked them out of the playoffs, Cowtown has mastered the post-season so far, overwhelming Brooklin at home and overcoming division-winning and no.1 seed Sebastian by 14-points on the road. Add in a Week 16 romp over Durham and the Corn Kings have out-scored their opponents 106-38 over their last three games. It certainly appears that the team is peaking at the critical time. The Excaliburs are also on a bit of a roll, having won four in a row, including a victory over no.2 seed Toronto on the road in the quarter final round. York has never made it to the Conference Finals either, so both franchises are taking unfamiliar positions under the spotlight. But while the teams may be new to this type of game, there is one player, occupying a critical position, who has “seen the elephant” before and taken its tusks: Tom Brady wears an EFL Championship ring as reward for his record-setting season at the helm of the 18-1 Florida Dragons of 2008. It has been a long time since he’s been in a game like this, but he’s been there and conquered. Don’t estimate the value of that experience. Conversely, his opponent, Jimmy Garoppolo, has started only 7 games in his brief EFL career (2 of them in these playoffs) but he looks like he has been there before. His 8 touchdown passes and 145.8 passer rating in two playoff contests represents the fastest post-season start for a QB ever in the history of the league. He has been so close to flawless that it almost seems churlish to suggest that Brady has the upper hand by virtue of his experience. But, of course, Brady does. The York vet posted the 5th best passer rating in the league working with far less talent at the skill positions than the newbie Garoppolo, who has the luxury of having one of the league’s front-runners for MVP, Todd Gurley II behind him and a future hall-of-famer, Larry Fitzgerald, as his number one target. The mere presence of Gurley in the back field is enough to douse cold water on opposing pass rushes while his dual threat capability gives defensive coordinators migraines. If you try too hard to take Gurley out then Garoppolo has the poise and skill to get the most of Fitzgerald and long bomb threat, Mike Evans. The only answer to the problem of the Cowtown offence will be consistent penetration from the York front seven. But while the Cowtown offensive line can be beaten, the Swords’ D-line just isn’t the same without Geno Atkins. DeForest Buckner is a growing but not yet fully developed stud at defensive tackle and veteran end Charles Johnson still has a few moves left to reach the quarterback. But after those two, the front four is staffed by a rotation of very average to below-average middle-aged journeymen, putting tremendous pressure on All-Pro linebacker Von Miller to plug the gaps instead of rushing the passer. Expect the highly-regarded trio of all-star safeties in the York secondary to be in a gambling mood on Sunday to try and flip the field when their front seven starts to get weary. The Corn Kings’ defence has been inconsistent at times, but the bottom line is that they surrendered just 16.6 points per game during the regular season, good for 3rd overall, and generated a respectable 24 turnovers while committing only 15 of their own. There is talent at each level of the defence, featuring a strong pass rush from the edges, a stout middle of the line, and a potential shutdown corner in Aqib Talib anchoring the secondary. Brady’s best receivers are both tight ends while his main speed threat, Paul Richardson, sees limited action behind Danny Amendola and Kelvin Benjamin. Running back Nick Chubb is a nifty weapon out of the back field, but neither him nor starter Derrick Henry will be enough to cow the Cowtown defence out of their focus on Brady. When these teams met in Week Six, the Corn Kings started slowly, but finished strong and felt they simply ran out of time in a 21-19 loss. Expect them to pick up where they left off then, get on the board early and hold on for dear life. **PICK: COWTOWN**



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*This Week in EFL History
With Professor
Sterling Smitherman*

FROM THE EFL ARCHIVES – The Quarter Final round of the 2012 EFL season did not lack for drama, despite assurances from many experts that playing the games would be a mere formality in three of the four pairings. As often is the case however, not all outcomes followed the script.

The York-Virden match-up that many expected would come down to the final minute turned out to be the least interesting game of all. The Excaliburs finally owned their regular season nemesis, jumping out to an early 14-0 lead before pulling away with ease to win 41-21 **Tom Brady**, who had thrown 3 interceptions in Week 13 vs Virden, tore them

apart with 5 TD passes to 4 different receivers. **Victor Cruz** caught two TD passes to finish with 6 catches for 177 yards.

In Durham, the scheduled execution of divisional foe and substantial underdog Cowtown did not go as planned. Horrified Lizards fans could not believe their eyes as the Corn Kings carried a 27-13 lead into the 4th quarter. But a 25-point Durham rally in the 4th stunned the Corn Kings and made for a thrilling 38-27 win for the fans. **Matt Schaub** turned got the comeback started with a 37-yard TD pass to **Calvin Johnson**. After that he could do no wrong. For the second straight season, Durham had eliminated Cowtown in the first round.

On the coldest day of the year in Hell, the Undertakers exploded for 24 points in the 2nd quarter to take care of business against the reigning champion LA Knights with a 45-24 win. This game went as many had anticipated it would with **Drew Brees** continuing his mastery of the Knights (and the league for that matter) with 386 yards and 4 TD passes.

Finally, the big upset saw Markham take down the Blue Eagles 30-19 with help from a 102-yard kickoff return by **Joe McKnight** and 3 Scarborough turnovers. **Eli Manning** was effective in limited use while **Aaron Rodgers** sucked all day.