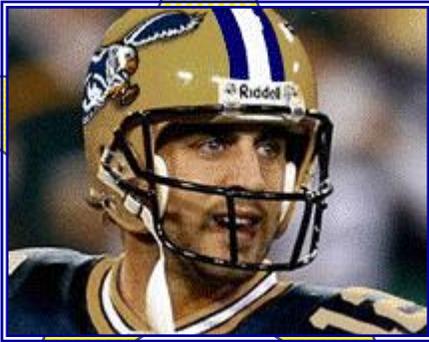


2011



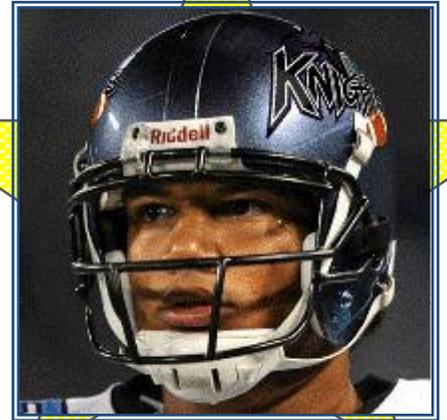
2011

Aaron Rodgers



EFL

Josh Freeman



EFL

WHO WILL LEAD...



EFL



EFL

Peyton Manning

Ben Roethlisberger



...TO FINAL VICTORY?

CANTON (AP) – “*Scarborough! Who ‘dat?’*” The line repeats itself wherever EFL fans congregate; in bars, online, Vegas, and in the man caves of fantasy league commissioners on draft day everywhere.

It is a question that will not be asked for long. The **Blue Eagles** from the bluffs are like the new **Florida Dragons**. Actually, they *are* the Dragons. Or the Dragons are now the Eagles. Either way you look at it, they are a team with the gear to fly high in 2011 and win it all.

Fans (even fanatic ones) can be forgiven for missing the switch. For three out of four pre-season matches the team wore its near iconic aqua-blue and orange uniforms and played two home games in Dragonmount. The legendary Evil Genius GM, **Jim Heaton** was busily trying to peddle **Chad Henne** at the 11th hour to hoard more draft picks and avoid a possible QB controversy in the Everglades. *Pro Football Weekly* got the jump on the competition with its annual pre-season rankings featuring **Aaron Rodgers** in a Dragons’ uniform on the cover. The prominent story heading into 2011 was Heaton’s Revenge. Would he deliver pay-back to the upstart **Pickering Spartans** – an expansion team that had hired a gunslinger to shoot down the mighty Dragons and spoil

a perfect regular season performance in 2010 – or face down another nemesis to regain the title he perceived as rightly belonging to him?

We know the answer to that question now and it is “no.” But while Heaton himself will not be around to witness redemption, his team certainly has that opportunity. Despite the sudden upheaval, the Blue Eagles went 4-0 in the pre-season and have to be considered the front-runners to represent the Can-Am Conference in the EFL Championship Game. This in spite of a neophyte owner who admittedly knows nothing about the game of football and, until recently, had only been to one football game in his entire life.

Welcome to the EFL, **Chris Dickinson** – the lucky billionaire who won the Dragons from wealthy Chinese heiress, **Cai Qing** in a game of *Mah Jong* on a recent vacation in China.

“I thought she was betting actual dragons and I thought, *cool! I’m going to get some Chinese dragons!*” Dickinson told the media when announcing the acquisition. “Man, was I disappointed when I realized it was just a football team – no offence. But they tell me it’s a good one.”

Unbeknownst to all but a select few, the Dragons did not actually belong to Heaton. Although he portrayed himself as the owner, he was in fact merely the brains behind the most successful EFL franchise in the league’s short four-year history. The actual power lay in China, where Heaton spent his off-seasons.

It turns out that during one of his trips to China, Heaton married a wealthy heiress related by direct line to the late Empress Cixi. She bought Heaton the Dragons as a wedding present, but is believed to have become jealous of the attention he gave the franchise and ultimately threw the team away while gambling with Dickinson.



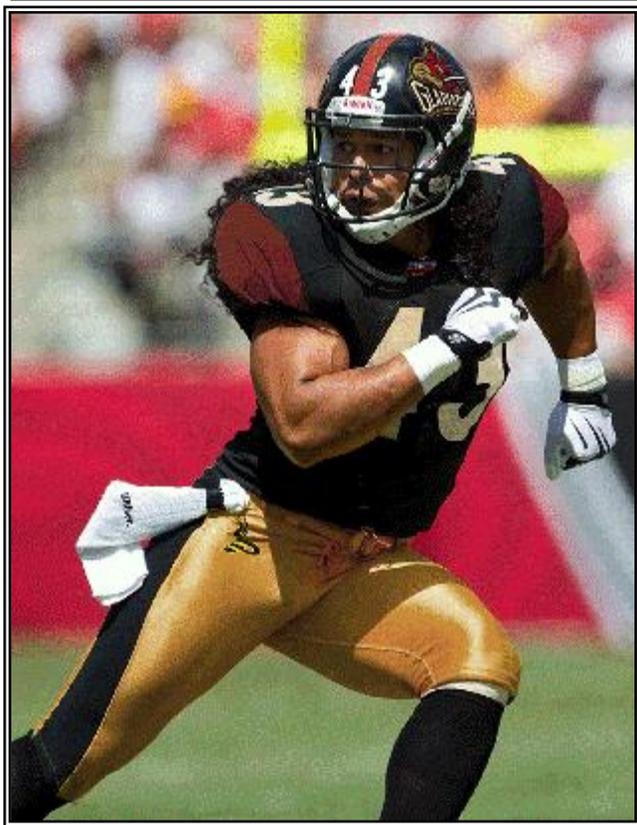
The Dowager Heiress, **Cai Qing**, grand-daughter of the late Empress Cixi and, until last month, secret owner of the Florida Dragons.

The news of the transfer shocked the entire league but nowhere did it hit harder than in Florida, where fans suddenly found themselves without a team, and not just any team – the *best* team. The players were equally stunned but, like true championship-calibre athletes, recovered quickly.

“Hey, this is a business and we’re professionals,” reserve cornerback and player union rep, **Andre’ Goodman** told EFL Preview. “As long as we have a place to play, we’ll play.”

“I like eagles better than dragons. That’s a fly ass logo, bro,” a jocular **Antonio Cromartie**, coming off the field, quipped while pointing to his new helmet.

Shutdown corner, **Darrelle Revis**, a favourite of Heaton’s, was less enthusiastic but tried to be diplomatic. “It seems wrong to me, but I guess that’s the growing pains of this league. I didn’t think you could own a team if you lived in China.” Soon after hearing the news, Revis’ agent, **Neil Schwartz** announced that his client would be seeking a renegotiation of his contract – already the highest in the EFL for a corner – and threatened a holdout.



What can a healthy **Troy Polamalu** do for the Gwinnett’s prospects in 2011? Some say enough to force a changing of the guard in the South Division.

What effect this controversy will have on the field remains to be seen. The entire coaching staff under Heaton has been released and replaced by Dickinson’s friends. The new Head Coach, introduced as, “my buddy, Jonesy” by the new owner, got his football education as a back-up tight end at Birchmount Park High School in the 70’s. The new Defensive Coordinator, ‘Pugs’ McIlwain used to play linebacker for Western and that is all that is known about him.

If any team has the talent to survive a total overhaul of the coaching staff it would be Scarborough. **Aaron Rodgers** makes it all happen with a strong arm, good pocket sense and sound decision-making. He still has the weapons around him to intimidate opponents but his supporting cast has lost some of its depth with the departure of **TJ Houshmandzadeh**, **CJ Spiller**, and the nagging foot injury to **Jonathan Stewart**. **Ray Rice** remains a versatile weapon coming out of the backfield but they will rely on him to carry more of the load than he did last year and this could challenge his durability. The offensive line scored an upgrade with the acquisition of tackle, **Donald Penn**, but guard, **Chris Kemoatu** appears to have regressed while stalwart, **Logan Mankins**, is fighting injury.

Whatever challenges the Scarborough offence may face in keeping up with a re-fitted offensive unit in Gwinnett will be compensated for by the ferocity of their defence, led by second-year sensation, **Ndamukong Suh** at defensive tackle and a bestial pair of defensive ends in **Justin Tuck** and **Dwight Freeney**. These three alone make for a fearsome pass rush. Add **Terrell Suggs** and **LaMarr Woodley** charging on the blitz while Revis, **Michael Griffin** and

Bandon Meriweather patrol the secondary and you have a quarterback’s nightmare.

One quarterback who is not afraid to confront the minefield of the Blue Eagles’ defence is Gwinnett’s new leader, **Ben Roethlisberger**. Getting harassed, dumped and pummelled by **Dwight Freeney and Co.** is nothing new to Big Ben, but having a couple of twin-threats coming out the backfield is. **LeSean McCoy** offers big play ability on the ground and blue chip insurance as an outlet receiver through the air while **Ahmad Bradshaw** is a sure-handed receiver and a powerful runner between the tackles. Although he posted good numbers last season, running back **Thomas Jones** is now out of the league for a reason – he did not command enough respect to force teams to bring eight into the box. With arguably the most dangerous running tandem in the league forcing defences to tighten up, the Gwinnett passing game should flourish with **Reggie Wayne** and **Jeremy Maclin** flying down the edges.

On defence, **Dave Birdsall’s** Gladiators return with a revamped secondary led by a healthy **Troy Polamalu** and newly acquired ball-hawk, **Asante Samuel**. These two blue-chip defenders are well-complimented by a defensive line anchored by **Casey Hampton** and a solid line-backing squad spear-headed by **DJ Williams**. The most dangerous return man in football, **Leon Washington**, rounds out a Gladiator team that, with sound execution and some good luck, could break the Scarborough three-year stranglehold on the South Division.



Arian Foster turns the corner on this way to a big gain in pre-season action. Can Foster carry the Cubs and young **Sam Bradford** to a playoff berth in the hotly-contested West Division?

opposing wide-outs.

Left tackle, **Joe Thomas** has a big assignment this year: protect the rookie. **Josh Freeman** looked good in camp and some are predicting big things for the first year starting quarterback. The explosiveness of **Jamaal Charles** and the inside power of **Cedric Benson** will keep opposing defences honest, opening up space for one of the best wide receivers in the league, **Roddy White**.

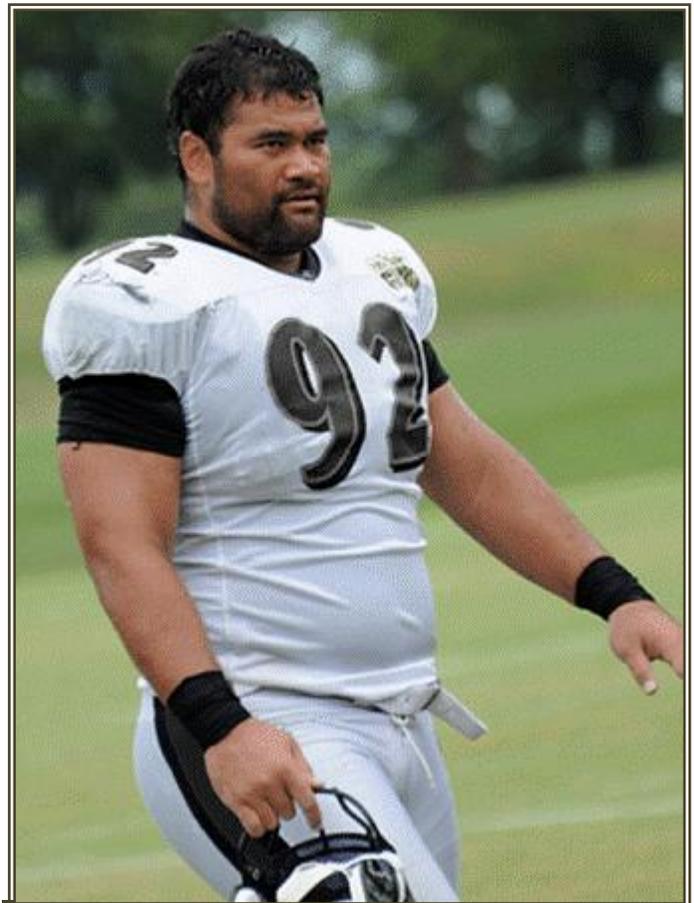
Chino looks to challenge the Knights again but this year finds itself behind their rivals out of the starting gate. They will rely on their "Big Three" defenders more than ever. **Haloti Ngata**, **Julius Peppers** and **James Harrison** may be the best at their positions and **Aqib Talib** is an aggressive ball-hawking corner in true Convicts style. The big question mark for Chino is whether **Jay Cutler** can direct a consistent attack with three ageing wide receivers and a workhorse running back, **Steven Jackson**, with a lot of miles under his feet.

Iowa City's **Sam Bradford** is still developing behind center but he has full box of tools at his disposal to build a winner. **Arian Foster**, **Larry Fitzgerald** and **Mike Wallace** spearhead an offence that may surprise. The Cubs have a good defence with the best inside linebacker in the league, **Patrick Willis** shoring up a defensive line featuring mainstay, **Vince Wilfork** at nose tackle. **Malcolm Jenkins** is the most versatile defensive back in the league and **DeAngelo Hall**, though mistake-prone, is ever a threat to steal the ball at an opportune moment. The Cubs are an underdog due to their quarterback, but if young

In the Pacific-Atlantic Conference, **Jason Findlay's** Patriots look like a lock once again to win the East Division with relative ease against lukewarm competition. The big trial for Charleswood will be escaping the conference. They have the top players to get it done, including a physical specimen starting at running back in **Adrian Peterson** and a good back-up who can also catch the ball, **Mike Goodson**. They signed **Marques Colston** to big money after Los Angeles tried to lure him away and **Jason Witten** continues to set the standard for his position every year.

York's **Tom Brady** will remind **Peyton Manning** that there is more than one elite quarterback in the division, but his team will eventually fall behind. The Excaliburs still have building left to do on the defensive side while enough remnants of a once powerful Patriots' defence remain in place to stop all but the best offences. If the Pats' secondary, led by veteran safety, **Ed Reed**, can stay healthy, they will cruise to the division title.

In the West, a brutal battle for the division is brewing. All four teams have a shot but the one most analysts pick to emerge from the pile holding the division ball is Los Angeles. The Knights were up against the cap heading into the off-season but managed to shed just enough weight to stay afloat and competitive. **Osi Umenyiora** was a key signing to shore up one side of the defensive line while the middle of that line is well-guarded by **Kevin Williams** and **BJ Raji**. Edge-rushers **Brian Orakpo** and **Kamerion Wimbley** will create pressure and will rack up more than their share of sacks with the best cornerback tandem in the league, **Nnamdi Asomugha** and **Charles Woodson**, shutting down

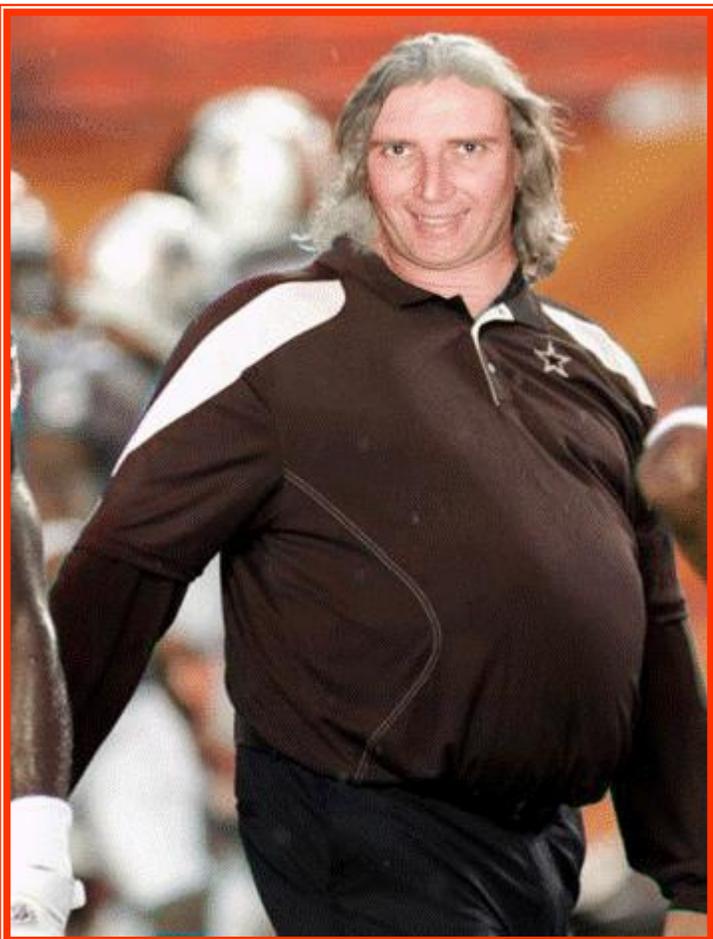


Haloti Ngata is one big piece of Chino's playoff hopes in 2011. Together with **Julius Peppers** they own the trenches.

Bradford can manage the game and **Deron Redding's** series of 12 motivational CDs, *'Be The Game, Boys!'* have their hoped-for effect on his players, the Cubs are very capable of grabbing a playoff spot.

Finally, there is the team nobody really likes. The movement of the former Ringgold franchise to Death Valley and the West Division did not bring the same team with it. **Chris Worthley** is back after writing *"I will not be a jerk"* two thousand times on a blackboard in a Canton High School. In no less than 25 transactions, Worthley transformed the franchise, dumping top names like **Maurice Jones-Drew**, **Big Ben** and **Chris Snee** along with their heavy salaries. After flirting through most of the pre-season with **Eli Manning** at quarterback, Worthley suddenly switched course and rescued **Drew Brees** from a dead end job in Virden. With **Andre Johnson**, **Mario Manningham** and **Braylon Edwards** at wide receiver, Brees will finally have some targets to throw at. The new look offence appears, on paper, to be no worse than it was last year. If they perform with more consistency in 2011 the team could make a move provided a defence headlined by **DeMarcus Ware**, **Clay Matthews** and **Charles Johnson** delivers on its promise to nail a coffin for opposing quarterbacks.

So what about last year's Champs, the **Pickering Spartans**? Was their powerful run to the Gale Sayers Trophy in 2010 a serendipitous confluence of opportunistic good fortune; or do they have the staying power to challenge at the same level in 2011? The debate rages with detractors pointing to the quarterback as the main reason why the Spartans will fall before the final game. **Matt Cassel** replaces an outgoing **Brett Favre**, who left quietly after photos of him showing off his new penile implant to a shocked hostess in the owner's box at Thermopylae Stadium surfaced on the Internet. No question the Spartans will lose an edge in the passing game as a result, which will put more pressure on the dangerous **Chris Johnson** and his capable back-up **Rashad Jennings**. The defence is no longer elite-calibre and will surrender yards and points to the better offences.



Markham coach, **Darrin Jones** has been working 20-hour days at the Dawg Pound trying to figure out how to get results from a lean talent base. Long hours spent at the office means take-out pizza, coca-cola, and lengthy discussions about football strategy with the Fat Lady over Bud Light and pork rinds.

Despite some backward steps, the Spartans are likely to get a pass in their own Division for want of a true challenger. Some think that Durham cannot be counted out, but their historical under-performance is proof that they cannot be counted in, either. FootballOutriders.Org, the statistics-based rating agency, declared their Durham formula to be their first "mathematical paradox;" indicating a "counter-intuitive result" where the value assigned to intuition is unknown. In plain English, Outriders' spokesman, **Harry Shultz** put it this way: "we have no idea where Durham will finish!"

In the long-shot category around the league, Cowtown appears to have rebounded from a depressing 2010 campaign, sporting a home-grown secondary that will keep them in games defensively and a true power runner in **Maurice Jones-Drew** that will help them move the chains. But lack of a pass rush and questions about **Joe Flacco's** consistency continue to muddy the outlook for 2011.

In South Carolina, the Regulators are recovering from the loss of **LeSean McCoy**, nabbed from under their noses by Gwinnett, and difficulties in player negotiations. The decision to move toward youth and clear cap room prompted the decision to trade defensive leader, **Ray Lewis** and all but throw in the towel for 2011. But South Carolina could still sneak into the playoffs if the North Division produces no serious challenger and things go right,

as they often do, for the plucky **Tony Romo** and Friends

Relegated to the fringe by Vegas odds-makers before a single snap has been taken, at odds of 250-1 or worse to win the Championship, are rebuilding outfits in Virden, Mohave, Markham and Garland. These teams just don't have the talent to make a serious push for the post-season, but the team most likely to defy the odds from this sorry bunch is the Hellfire. **Matt Schaub** has some pop in his arm and a pair of big bulls-eyes in wide receivers, **Hakeem Nicks** and **Terrell Owens**. The Mohave defensive line is a mess but **Cameron Wake** is a danger to opposing quarterbacks and the secondary can still play. Throw in the oppressive heat of the Fiery Depths and on any given day Bobby Elder's satanic squad might tear your heart and soul out.

One thing everyone seems to agree on is that the competition in the EFL will be broader-based this year. Scarborough remains the team to beat, but a pack of challengers, led by their Division-rival Gwinnett, will be yapping at their heels the whole way. A good quarterback will make the difference. But who will lead their team to final victory?



It is written

The fate of your team is written. Look, if you dare, at the future...

BROUGHT TO YOU FROM THE OTHER SIDE BY **Jimmy the Geek**

Blades will bend opposite intrepid loyalists, guardians of the gerontogeous lands. Les Chevaliers Bleux tilt those who dare challenge the rightful heirs to the land of the dying aubade over the stench of rotting corpses from the valley. Thunder shakes the tundra but none will pass through the icy lands save as spirit banished from earth by the Spartan's spear. The combatants of the arena will pray for a bow to reach the soaring eagle. In vain they pray, as they are prey. Through shielded mountain fastness the eagle dives and plucks the Trojan's eye. The Nobles shall rise above the Good and loose the arrow true to fell the bird of jove. – The Football Oracle

CANTON, OH – On the western outskirts of Canton there is a wooded hill overlooking a small creek that runs through a farmer's field. On a windless night the ceaseless burbling of the water over the rocks and the chirring of crickets is occasionally punctuated by a raspy moan or a shrill howl emanating from a dark burrow at the top of the hill where a solitary soul wrestles with the torment and rapture of her transcendent visions. She is known as the Football Oracle – a former Green Bay Packers fan who foretold of the demise of the old NFL and was driven mad, some say, by the vision.

Every year I make the trip to see the Oracle – not that I'm superstitious or anything – but I believe she is a lonely hag who needs the company now that fewer bettors make the annual pilgrimage. Once the hottest commodity in sports betting, the Oracle's fallibility is causing her following to dwindle. It's not that she is wrong, *per say*; it is just that she is getting harder to interpret. Look at that crap above, for instance. What is a "dying aubade?"

My thought is: if she was right so many times before, she is still right. I am just going to have to do a better job of making sense of the gibberish. In fairness to the Oracle, in her more lucid moments she is very clear that some portions of the future cannot be seen by man. "Remember, Man has Free Will; that can defy, or defer, the Creator's Plan," she told me once over a steaming cup of alfalfa tea. Well, here it goes. What follows is my best guess at what the Oracle saw in her most recent transcendent visions.

PACIFIC – ATLANTIC CONFERENCE

EAST DIVISION



CHARLESWOOD PATRIOTS

Jason Findlay

Predicted Finish: 11-5

OFFENSE: The Pats held on to free agent, Marques Colston and traded for Santonio Holmes to add a deep passing threat. There is depth at WR behind the top two but it is not explosive. Jason Witten is an All Pro at his position, but there is nobody behind him either. The offensive line boasts a budding star at guard in Carl Nicks while fullback Ovie Mughelli should compensate for a pair of very average tackles. Adrian Peterson has something to prove and came to training camp with a chip on his shoulder. Peyton Manning will have lots of help, signalling a bright outlook for the Pats' attack. **Rating: A-**

DEFENSE: A move back to the 3-4 this year will result in better pass coverage through the middle while the return of veteran John Abraham to the top tier of pass rushers off will allow a group of good but unspectacular corners to pick their moments to gamble. Ed Reed is becoming savvier with age but he is also more brittle. If the secondary can stay healthy, the defence as a whole will be a top grade unit. **Rating: A-**

SPECIAL TEAMS: There are two kickers on the roster with Stephen Gostkowski kicking off and Dave Rayner holding down the place-kicking duties. Jason Baker is a serviceable punter and no more is needed on this team. The league has figured out punt returner, Jacoby Jones' first move while Mike Goodson's kick returns are average at best. **Rating: B-**

SUMMARY: The Pats are the class of the East Division once again. Improved competition within the conference may impact their won-loss record but it will not hurt their divisional standing. The Pats can make the leap from very good team to great team if Adrian Peterson finally emerges as a truly elite running back.



YORK EXCALIBURS

Jay Hammond

Predicted Finish: 8-8

OFFENSE: The Excaliburs made an off-season investment in the running game by acquiring Brandon Jacobs to spell the explosive Darren McFadden and by adding tackle, Jason Peters and guard, Steve Hutchinson to an offensive line that can now rank itself among the top four in the league. Tom Brady will have time to throw and defences will have to respect the ground game. While this situation would be a recipe for league passing records on most teams, York's Achilles is the lack of a true number one wide receiver. Michael Crabtree is talented but flighty and Michael Jenkins is merely average. A quartet of overrated tight ends will not compensate. **Rating: A**

DEFENSE: A healthy Brian Urlacher and sensational rookie line-backer, Von Miller will help upgrade a defence that ranked 14th in the league last season. The line sports a pair of underrated pass rushers in Tommy Kelly and Cullen Jenkins but there is no true run-stuffer. The Swords still have a long way to go before they can compete defensively with the league's top teams but they should not be overlooked. The line-backers tend to drop back in coverage and their secondary jumps routes, putting the takeaway in play. Sometimes that's enough. **Rating: C+**

SPECIAL TEAMS: Graham Gano is a young, strong, but inaccurate place-kicker. There will be plenty of prayers in Camelot when he steps up with the game on the line. Sav Rocca is accurate, if not long, in the punting game. Fifth round rookie pick Jeremy Kerley looks solid on both kickoff and punt returns. **Rating: B**

SUMMARY: The Excaliburs can look forward to a substantial improvement over last year's 3-13 campaign, but whether or not they can make it into the post-season for the first time in their franchise's history remains to be seen. They look like they should be able to handle the competition in their own division and could even steal a game from front-runner, Charleswood. However, the West Division will be a challenge and they do not get many inter-conference breaks in their schedule with trips to Cowtown and South Carolina; two teams that could knock them off on a good day. The Yorkies could make the post-season with a little luck.



MOHAVE HELLFIRE

Bobby Elder

Predicted Finish: 6-10

OFFENSE: Expect the Hellfire to pass to set up the pass. Their trio of young running backs are too young for Prime Time and lack a leader of the pack. Running behind an offensive line that continues to struggle every year will not help them, nor will it help Matt Schaub. But at least Schaub knows how to find the open man when he gets the chance and he will have his share of opportunities while tracking big targets like Hakeem Nicks, Terrell Owens and Benjamin Watson. The Mohave offence can do damage against mediocre defences but will struggle against the better pass rushing units and veteran secondaries. **Rating: B**

DEFENSE: When the Hellfire failed to sign Trent Cole they lost a critical part of their defence and were forced into a youth movement on the line. Tyson Alualu has a bright future but at the moment he is alone in the trenches. Cameron Wake is a dangerous pass rusher but limited in what he can do on his own. The secondary is the best part of this unit but durability issues haunt. The bottom line is: Mohave cannot stop the run which will make for long days in the desert heat. **Rating: C**

SPECIAL TEAMS: Place-kicker, Rob Bironas has distance and accuracy in his leg. Ben Graham is a decent punter. The return game has two new faces with Jalen Parmele returning kicks in an uninspiring way and Quan Cosby returning punts without a hint of danger to opponents. Don't expect any lifts from special teams unless it's a last second 50+ field goal from Rob; which is good enough for a + in the following rating. **Rating: C+**

SUMMARY: Mohave has an outside chance to challenge for a wildcard berth if everything goes right for their offence and they stave off big plays in the passing game of their opponents. It's a lot to ask since the safety will be called to run-stop duty more often than recommended by any standard defence manual. The Hellfire will have hope as long as they throw caution to the wind and get aggressive. They have nothing to lose apart from possibly finishing below the pathetic Violators.



VIRDEN VIOLATORS

Lance Barrate

Predicted Finish: 3-13

OFFENSE: Eli Manning joins a basement dweller and to his surprise finds he is a downgrade on the incumbent. The decision to trade Drew Brees to Death Valley is not a knock against Brees, but recognition that his talents are being wasted on a team with raw and developing talent still at least two years away from contention. Brees moved a mountain to earn Virден 6 wins last year and since the overall picture is not much different this year, a field general with a big, but not *as* big an ego, was required to guide the franchise forward through another lean year. The acquisitions of Ryan Clady and Branden Albert signal future successes in the ground game but for now the running attack looks weak. Mike Thomas and Dez Bryant represent a good future for the passing game but the future is not now for the Violators. **Rating: B-**

DEFENSE: The defence may be the worst in the league starting with the line and moving back until your reach Eric Flowers at cornerback. The Virден secondary is actually respectable with LaRon Landry and Eric Berry forming one of more promising safety tandems in the league and Corey Webster holding down the other corner spot. The run defence, however, will revive struggling running backs around the league and will probably surrender a record or two to an elite runner. **Rating: C-**

SPECIAL TEAMS: Dez Bryant and Mike Thomas are both dangerous punt returners fighting for action. Kick return specialist, Courtney Roby is steady but no longer a viable threat to go the distance. Lawrence Tynes has the range but has a tendency to spray the ball wide. Tim Masthay is a better than average young punter. **Rating: B+**

SUMMARY: The best Virден fans can hope for is that Lance Barrate continues to get the most out of this young group of players with a view to developing their potential. Only five players on the roster have reached the ripe old age of 30 or more and 26 players, almost half, are 24 years old or less. The groundwork is set for a future push to the title but in 2011 there will be lots of learning from mistakes and annoying growing pains.

WEST DIVISION



LOS ANGELES KNIGHTS

Jeff Dohrn

Predicted Finish: 12-4

OFFENSE: If the pre-season is a true indication of where this offence is heading, the Knights may finally have it right after years of struggling at the game's most important position. Josh Freeman looks like the real deal at QB and if he comes through as expected the Knights will finally finish among the top half of the league's offences. Jamaal Charles is the most explosive runner in the league while banger, Cedric Benson is the perfect complement to grind out tough red zone yards. Roddy White is gaining recognition as an elite receiver while Tony Gonzalez is a world class outlet man. Jeff Dohrn wishes he had more reliable second and third options at wide receiver but Steve Smith and Lee Evans are still dangerous if left unattended. Joe Thomas anchors a good line. **Rating: A-**

DEFENSE: The traditional strength of this team is not as intimidating as in past seasons but there are still plenty of reasons to respect the Knights' defence. Nnamdi Asomugha and Charles Woodson return as the best CB tandem in the league while B.J. Raji is causing people to overlook Kevin Williams' pre-season troubles. Osi Umenyiora is a key addition, forcing fumbles and combining with Kamerion Wimbley and Brian Orakpo to give LA a top notch pass rush. Don't expect many interceptions and expect opponents to target a relatively weak left side. **Rating: A**

SPECIAL TEAMS: Steve Weatherford is an accurate punter. Dan Carpenter has one of the longest ranges in the league but tends to miss the easy ones. Eric Weems is a dynamic and dangerous return man who promises to shorten the field for the Knights' offence returning both kicks and punts. **Rating: A-**

SUMMARY: On paper this is a very good team and an early favourite to represent the PAC in the EFL Final, but one can never take anything involving the Knights for granted. They have a knack for unpredictability – over-achieving in 2009 and under-achieving in 2010. Maybe this year they'll be bang on with the high expectations assigned to them by most sports analysts. Unfortunately they are the front-runner in what is shaping up to be the league's most competitive division. There are no patsies in the West and this will make it a harder test for Jeff Dohrn's crew; a test the Oracle predicts they will pass.



IOWA CITY CUBS

Deron Redding

Predicted Finish: 9-7

OFFENSE: Arian Foster is poised to join the ranks of the league's elite running backs and his impact will give developing signal-caller, Sam Bradford much needed space to make the throws he needs to make if the Cubs are going to compete with the league's best teams. With Larry Fitzgerald and Mike Wallace split wide, Kellen Winslow dominating the middle of the field and D'Brickashaw Ferguson protecting his blind side the young Cubs QB is in a near ideal situation. Now it's up to him to deliver. **Rating: B+**

DEFENSE: The Cubs have one of the hallmarks of a great defence with impact players at each level. Vince Wilfork plugs the middle of the line while Patrick Willis roams the field behind him looking for targets. Malcolm Jenkins is a fantastic and versatile corner who can also play safety and Antrel Rolle provides insurance coverage against the deep ball. The Cubs have considerable depth on the defensive line but a corresponding critical lack of depth at linebacker that could spell trouble late in games. Injury concerns at cornerback could also hurt. Put the pluses and minuses together and this unit is in the black but not among the super-rich. **Rating: B+**

SPECIAL TEAMS: Neil Rackers has regained his accuracy and he has the range for a long-shot late in the game. Adam Podlesh is an average punter. Michael Spurlock won the kick and punt return duties in camp, showing bursts of speed that could carry a return from the goal line to the house. He is less confident facing off gunners in punting situations. Dexter McCluster is a dangerous alternate option to call upon to return punts. **Rating: A-**

SUMMARY: The Cubs are a solid team and historically a well-coached one. With a more experienced signal-caller they would be much more of a threat. As it stands, Deron Redding's crew will compete in every game and put themselves in a position to win. The performance of Bradford in the clutch and a few key plays going one way or the other could very well stand between stunning success and mediocrity.



DEATH VALLEY UNDERTAKERS

Chris Worthley

Predicted Finish: 9-7

OFFENSE: The acquisition of Drew Brees is a long term gain for this franchise, but how effective he will be in his first season trying to learn a new offence from scratch after spending training camp with Virden is an open question. He has one of the best wide receivers in the game, Andre Johnson, to rely on when the chips are down and an intriguing big play option in Mario Manningham. Aaron Hernandez has promise at H-back and Rob Gronkowski looks serviceable at tight end. He also has Jake Long and Brandon Moore guarding his left side, but that's where the highlights end for the offence. Rashard Mendenhall is okay out of the backfield but he is not going to take control of game on his own. The right side of the line is patchwork and unreliable. There is a lot of potential in this unit but it is fragile and will depend on Brees' performance. **Rating: B**

DEFENSE: The Undertakers' 3-4 alignment features an elite corps of line-backers who may just be good enough to fully compensate for a relatively weak secondary vulnerable to the deep ball. With Jerod Mayo, Clay Matthews and DeMarcus Ware already in place to strike fear into the hearts of quarterbacks everywhere, the late acquisition of veteran Ray Lewis put this group over the top. Charles Johnson and Nick Fairly add pressure from the outside and the interior of the line to round off the league's deadliest pass rush. **Rating: A-**

SPECIAL TEAMS: John Kasay is a dependable kicker. The most interesting thing about punter, Zoltan Mesko is his name. Sensational rookie, Randall Cobb and speedster, Brandon Tate offer big play potential returning kick-offs while Devin Hester looks to rebound from an off-year in 2010 to once again regain his status as an elite, Hall-of-Fame punt returner. **Rating: A+**

SUMMARY: All the signs point to another roller coaster ride for the team that has yet to recover from Jack Buffolano's legacy. Whatever happens during the regular season, nobody can say that Chris Worthley did not do his best to rid himself of nearly every player he inherited when Tim Molinaro sold him the team. Maybe this team needed a complete exorcism to expunge the curse, or maybe things are about to get worse for the league's ugly step-sister franchise.



CHINO CONVICTS

Rob Nazar

Predicted Finish: 6-10

OFFENSE: Jay Cutler is back and more mediocre than ever. The mistake-prone QB with the million dollar arm takes the reins back from Donovan McNabb for another year, but with rookie Cam Newton waiting in the wings Cutler is on borrowed time. If Newton is not ready, Cutler will have to perform now while facing the challenge of having to raise the level of those around him instead of the reverse. The top three wide receivers are well-known but the youngest, Chad Ochocinco, is 33 years old. Steven Jackson looked more like a Clydesdale than ever in training camp raising questions about his big play ability. Greg Olsen, once a player to watch, is looking more and more like an average tight end and will lose some playing time to Anthony Fasano. It's not a bad offence, but it's not a really good one either, with plenty of unanswered questions. **Rating: B-**

DEFENSE: With Haloti Ngata and Julius Peppers on the line and James Harrison plugging the gaps, Chino will be, hands down, the toughest defence to run against in 2011. How much this will mean to their chances of winning the West Division remains to be seen but it makes opposing offences virtually one-dimensional from the start. Peppers and Harrison will apply the pressure on the quarterback while ball-thieves, Aqib Talib and Nick Collins will be waiting for the pair to force mistakes. When healthy this is a top grade unit, but depth at all levels could be a concern as the season wears on. **Rating: A**

SPECIAL TEAMS: Billy Cundiff replaces Jeff Reed as "Mister Reliable" at the place-kicker position. Shane Lechler is probably the best punter in the league. Return specialist Josh Cribbs looks done. **Rating: B+**

SUMMARY: Predicting a last place finish for the storied Chino franchise feels blasphemous, especially with so many stars on defence. But there will be no easy games in the West this year and, in the end, success or failure will come down to the play of the quarterbacks. Jay Cutler is the most questionable of the western lot and his supporting cast at the skill positions has seen better days. Unless Cutler plays over his head, the Convicts' offence will fall behind and with them Chino's position in the standings.

CAN-AM CONFERENCE

NORTH DIVISION



PICKERING SPARTANS

Gus Konstantakos

Predicted Finish: 10-6

OFFENSE: The offensive line, led by guard, Chris Snee, is strong throughout. With Jim Kleinsasser laying the lead block, Chris Johnson is poised for another banner year running the football. Johnson's performance is more important than ever with Matt Cassel taking over for Brett Favre behind center. Cassel is a classic "game manager" who can execute the game plan but cannot be relied upon to carry a team on his shoulders for long. He has a pair of proven weapons at wide receiver in Percy Harvin and Anquan Boldin and a budding star at tight end in Mercedes Lewis. It's a perfect situation for him that will bring out the best in the Pickering QB. **Rating: A**

DEFENSE: The safest bet in Sparta is that their defence will not repeat the Top Two overall performance they achieved in 2010. Many of the same faces are back in 2011 but they return a little less hungry. Although there is balance and synergy, there do not appear to be any true stars on this squad. Joe Haden can be a game-changer at cornerback while David Harris remains solid at middle linebacker. The defensive line is above average but, with the exception of Ray Edwards, will have to rely on the line-backers to generate pressure on the quarterback. The group is good enough to slow down a good opponent, but don't count on them to stop anybody cold. **Rating: B**

SPECIAL TEAMS: Josh Scobee is accurate from a distance but sometimes boots it wide. Chris Kluwe is good but nothing special as a punter. Percy Harvin is always a threat to carry a kick-off to pay dirt. Andre Roberts is not very flashy returning punts, making it worth giving Antoine Cason a try. **Rating: B+**

SUMMARY: The defending champs enter a brand new campaign with slightly burnished armour and a few bent shields but they still remain the team to beat in the North Division. Expect the Pickering offence to carry most of the load throughout the year. However, while the defence may no longer be championship-calibre, it would be a mistake to try and take liberties against them – they are capable of making big plays and a big play from the Pickering defence is even bigger when their offence takes over.



DURHAM THUNDER LIZARDS

George Kaldis

Predicted Finish: 9-7

OFFENSE: Although the offence looks dangerous with Philip Rivers poised (as he always is) for a great year, the offensive line suffered a significant downgrade in the off-season and, if Michael Turner had trouble finding the holes opened up by Steve Huthcinson and Leonard Davis in 2010, he will be lost trying to find daylight behind Uche Nwaneri and Eugene Monroe. Durham has the best trio of wide receivers in the league, with Danny Amendola, Calvin Johnson and Dwayne Bowe complementing a pair of all-star tight ends in Antonio Gates and Vernon Davis. As usual with George Kaldis' teams, everything appears to be in place until the games are actually played. So until the games are played, it is difficult to predict how effective this unit will be. **Rating: B+**

DEFENSE: The first two levels of the defence have noticeably degraded. Ever-ready Jared Allen looks one step behind last year's form while natural nose tackle Paul Soliai has been plugged into the defensive end in Durham's 3-4 alignment. Elvis Dumervil is out for the season, leaving Quincy Black trying to replace him. There is good news, however. Jonathan Vilma remains a stalwart at middle linebacker while Devin McCourty is playing like a shutdown corner. The 'nickel' and 'dime' packages rate highly. **Rating: B**

SPECIAL TEAMS: Adam Vinatieri is money in the bank, allowing Mason Crosby to focus on kicking the ball really hard off the tee. Jon Ryan is an artist inside the 20 but don't expect the big boomer from his leg. Brandon Banks brings a potential TD on each kick return while Ted Ginn Jr. is among the best returning punts. **Rating: A**

SUMMARY: If the offence performs to its potential, the Lizards will mount a stiff challenge to the defending champs despite a second tier defence neglected in the off-season. But if they under-achieve as they did in 2010, it will expose a dangerously under-manned run defence and make for long and frustrating days in the trenches.



COWTOWN CORN KINGS

Jim Coghlin

Predicted Finish: 8-8

OFFENSE: Finishing dead last in offensive efficiency would normally call for drastic changes, but the Corn Kings made just one major move to overhaul their offence in 2011: they traded for Maurice Jones-Drew and released Marion Barber. They also added Todd Heap and signed Bernard Scott to add depth but otherwise it is the same cast of deadbeats who accounted for fewer points than any other team in 2010. Cowtown's offensive line was riddled by injuries last year, but the line enters this season healthy and Jim Coghlin is banking on a solid performance to keep Joe Flacco unmolested and on his feet. Santana Moss and Zach Miller are perennially underrated and will keep the passing attack afloat while MJD moves the pile between the tackles. **Rating: B+**

DEFENSE: If the offence was bad in 2010 the defence, ranked 15th overall, was only marginally better. The Kings had the worst rated pass defence in the league but look for that to change in 2011. The emergence of Tramon Williams as bona fide shutdown corner and the progress of Vontae Davis will ensure better pass coverage. The secondary is deep and will be tough to crack in 'nickel' and 'dime' packages. Stephen Tulloch and Derrick Johnson at inside linebacker back a questionable defensive line only marginally upgraded by rookie, Marcel Dareus. The pass rush is bolstered by rookie, Ryan Kerrigan, but not enough to scare anybody. **Rating: B-**

SPECIAL TEAMS: Olindo Mare is a steady place-kicker and Mike Scifres remains one of the top punters. Bernard Scott is a serviceable kick returner while Greg Camarillo emerged from stiff competition as the most reliable of an average group of punt returners. **Rating: B**

SUMMARY: The Corn Kings are improved from last year but that is not saying much coming off their worst season. With weaker competition in the North Division, however, this improvement could translate into a disproportionately better record than one might expect. With a little luck and the possibility of a Durham meltdown, the Corn Kings have enough talent to sneak into the playoffs as a wild card. But if their luck falters, they could be fighting Markham to stay out of the basement.



MARKHAM NORTH STARS

Darrin Jones

Predicted Finish: 3-13

OFFENSE: The Mark Sanchez Era officially begins in Markham. With the excitement of breaking in a new QB in the pre-season dissipating before a single play has been run from scrimmage, fans are beginning to take a hard look at this team and don't like what they see. When Michael Roos is your best offensive player, you have problems. With the "Great Galloping Hope," DeAngelo Williams turning up lame in camp, the North Stars will be forced to turn to Jahvid Best and Joseph Addai to take heat off Sanchez. Kenny Britt is a talented big play threat but he is not ready yet to take control of the offence. Similarly, tight end Jared Cook is at least a year away from realizing his potential. This will be the worst offence in the league and Sanchez won't be entirely to blame. **Rating: C-**

DEFENSE: In the early, headier days of the pre-season, Markham made headlines when they landed Trent Cole from Death Valley and signed him to a huge contract. It looked like the North Stars were getting serious about moving to the next level, but the air went out of that balloon rather quickly when it became obvious that the offence had too many holes. Cole brings respectability to a defence that is not bad, but not nearly good enough to compensate for their offence. The secondary has four solid starters and Jonathan Babineaux and Shaun Ellis join Cole to form a sturdy front three. There won't be much help from the line-backers. When the fourth quarter arrives and this unit has already spent 30 minutes on the field, expect a serious downgrade in effectiveness. **Rating: C+**

SPECIAL TEAMS: Donnie Jones is well-placed as a world class punter about to get a lot of work. Rian Lindell will get plenty of field goal opportunities as drives falter outside the red zone. Stefan Logan is a world class kick returner who will give the offence much needed field position. **Rating: A**

SUMMARY: It's not easy to picture this team winning even three games this year, but Darrin Jones' tenaciousness will keep the Stars close in games they have no business competing in and his meticulously planned game day strategy will pull off an upset or two.

SOUTH DIVISION



SCARBOROUGH BLUE EAGLES

Chris Dickinson

Predicted Finish: 13-3

OFFENSE: The Blue Eagles will soar high offensively but not quite at Dragons' altitude. Aaron Rodgers is the key to the attack and he is well-protected by a very good line featuring Logan Mankins and the underrated Donald Penn at right tackle. Brandon Marshall draws a lot of attention from double-teams and still snags balls in traffic on third down. Ray Rice is a dual weapon on the ground and in the short passing game but the running backs as a group lack a grinder capable of punching a ball through a wall of meat, which will tell on their ability to put away an opponent. DeSean Jackson is an offensive toy that brings a *Madden 2012* quality to the offence. **Rating: A**

DEFENSE: While the defences in LA, Chino and Death Valley are very strong in certain areas, no defence matches Scarborough's in potential for complete dominance. They have no meaningful weaknesses and possess pronounced strengths at every level. Whether deployed in a 4-3 or a 3-4, the Blue Eagles can stop any offence in the league. Ndamukong Suh, Justin Tuck and Darrelle Revis are among the best at their positions and they have a lot of help from their teammates. The possibility of a contract holdout by Revis is the only sour note in an otherwise ecstatic symphony of defensive domination. **Rating: A+**

SPECIAL TEAMS: Who will kick field goals for the Eagles, Sebastian Janikoski or Ryan Longwell? Dustin Colquitt brings nothing special to the punting game. CJ Spiller and DeSean Jackson bring real excitement to the return game – TD or fumble? **Rating: A**

SUMMARY: The Blue Eagles are, on paper, the team to beat once again. But as strong as they are, they are not in the same league as last year's super-power that fell to no one during the regular season before finally slipping to an equally daunting adversary in the Conference Championship. This year their main challenger within the conference comes from their own Division. With the recent ownership upheaval and a new coach on the sidelines, Scarborough could find themselves looking up at Gwinnett when the season ends.



GWINNETT GLADIATORS

Dave Birdsall

Predicted Finish: 12-4

OFFENSE: The Glads believe they finally have their quarterback. Big Ben never quite settled in with Meadowlands or Ringgold but looks at home wearing the black, gold and red of Gwinnett. Without Matt Cassel to hold them back and with two super weapons coming out of the back field in LeSean McCoy and Ahmad Bradshaw, the Glads are prepared to carve up opposing defences with darts to Reggie Wayne and bombs to Jeremy Maclin. The acquisition of Kris Dielman gives them the leader on the line they lacked last season. Expect this offence to lead the league in points. **Rating: A+**

DEFENSE: The offence will set the tone, but the reason some odds-makers feel Gwinnett is an even bet to unseat Scarborough is their defence, led by the phenomenal Troy Polamalu – one of the rare safeties who can literally steal a game by himself when the moment calls for it. The three-man front is strong with Robert Mathis and Darnell Dockett flanking centerpiece Casey Hampton. The linebackers are workman-like and solid, if not in an exclusive class. Asante Samuel brings elite ball-hawking skills to the secondary but suffers from lack of a solid partner on the opposite side. There is little depth in the secondary and this could pose problems should Polamalu or Samuel succumb to injury. **Rating: A**

SPECIAL TEAMS: Josh Brown has a strong leg but can make a coach nervous. Andy Lee is simply the best at his position, as is return specialist Leon Washington, who poses severe risks to opposing special teams. **Rating: A**

SUMMARY: A bad break, a good one, or an untimely injury could make all the difference in the battle for the South Division. When the Gladiators put their best foot forward they can beat any team in the league, including their divisional nemesis. At the level they wish to compete, however, little things can make a big difference. Without their stars in the secondary, Gwinnett is vulnerable to the vertical passing game. The Oracle cannot see when the injuries will come – only that they will come – and when they do it would help if they came against South Carolina or Garland, not Scarborough.



SOUTH CAROLINA REGULATORS **Hal Corson**

Predicted Finish: 6-10

OFFENSE: There are two versions of this squad: the one with Tony Romo and the other one. In their previous incarnation in Kutztown, the team would rise and fall with Romo. Now they may not get that chance if reports about his nagging gout are true. The Regulators signed Jason Campbell just to make sure there was somebody available, other than rookie, Christian Ponder, who could actually throw the ball under pressure. Frank Gore joins the team after Gwinnett nabbed LeSean McCoy in protected free agency. They managed to keep their principal asset at wide receiver, Greg Jennings and drafted the talented, AJ Green to line up opposite him. The wide-receiving squad is stacked with talent for the future and has enough in the present to maintain respectability. Brandon Pettigrew and Chris Cooley elevate an already capable passing game. **Rating: B**

DEFENSE: From a talent viewpoint this squad has some assets moving forward. Tamba Hali is a beast rushing off the edge but take him away and there is nobody to put pressure on the quarterback. Richard Seymour seems to get better with age and it's a good thing because young nose tackle Amobi Akoye needs the help holding down the center of the three-man front. Tracy Porter is a competent first corner but unproven rookies and free agent prospects signed from the other leagues line up behind him. Patrick Chung is a hard hitter but a potential liability in coverage. In the final analysis, this defence will probably suck. **Rating: C**

SPECIAL TEAMS: It's curious when a team with as many holes as South Carolina has carries two kickers on its roster and gives both kicking duties to one. Nate Kaeding is "towel boy" for David Buehler, who looks no more impressive than Kaeding. Brian Moorman is a fine punter who is stingy surrendering return yards. The extremely average Javier Arenas holds down both kick and punt return duties. **Rating: A-**

SUMMARY: Rebuilding was a strategy forced upon South Carolina by circumstance but now that they are in it, they have the luxury of sitting back and enjoying a season where there are no expectations, but opportunities for an upset. The Regulators will not go far, but on any given day, with Romo at the helm, they could surprise.



GARLAND MUSTANGS **Doug Shirley**

Predicted Finish: 3-13

OFFENSE: The team invested in the ground game by keeping Matt Forte and trading for Peyton Hillis. At first glance this looks like an upgrade and a coup for the offence. While both are good players, they will suffer from an offensive line that ranks at the bottom of the league. Jeff Faine leads a motley crew that will do nothing to keep Matt Ryan comfortable in the pocket or open holes for their good but not great running backs. Wes Welker will get open but will his quarterback be able to find him as Roberto Garza is pushed back into his face? The Mustangs will still manage to put some points on the board because Ryan is that good, but don't expect any fireworks. **Rating: C**

DEFENSE: The Mustangs' 3-4 does not carry the weight at line-backer it did last year. Karlos Dansby and Brian Cushing occupy the middle, flanked by Bryan Thomas and Anthony Spencer. The defensive line spotlights Chris Avril and Fred Robbins, both capable of penetration on their way to the passer but only Robbins stands out against the run. The veteran corner, Ron Bartell is surrounded by potential elite talent in Patrick Peterson, Earl Thomas and Eric Weddle but only Weddle is currently maturing into his role. The outlook may be bright for next year, but for now this is a unit that is still learning how to play together. **Rating: C**

SPECIAL TEAMS: Robbie Gould and Sam are both middle of the road at their respective positions. Emmanuel Sanders is consistent returning kicks but not explosive. Who knew Patrick Peterson would be so versatile? Garland's rookie is their best corner and a deadly punt return option. **Rating: A-**

SUMMARY: Garland went backwards last year after being surprisingly competitive in 2009. This year they appear to be treading water while the water level sinks around them. This means that the Mustangs have the opportunity to improve their record despite a slight downgrade in their personnel. They could easily switch positions with South Carolina in the standings but the playoffs are out of the question. So says the Football Oracle!

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JIMMY'S WEEK ONE PICKS

CHARLESWOOD @ MOHAVE (line – PATRIOTS by 4)

Charleswood aims to get revenge for last year's opening day loss at the Fiery Depths. In that game, Manning was picked three times and Matt Schaub threw for over 300 yards and three TD passes. It looked like a statement game at the time but turned out to be a fluke. If Mohave manages to pull off the same kind of upset this week, Pats fans can relax slightly because it will still be a fluke, although an annoying fluke that could get in the way of home field advantage in the playoffs. Adrian Peterson will run over the Hellfire defensive line on the way to a comfortable win that will look closer than it really is, thanks to a last minute TD in garbage time by the Mohave offence. **PICK: CHARLESWOOD**

YORK @ VIRDEN (line –EXCALIBURS by 6)

For York, the most difficult thing about this game will be spending time in the visitor's locker room at *TERRORDOME*. Virden tries every trick in the book to make it uncomfortable for the visiting team, including cutting off their hot water, placing "change mats" on the floor instead of benches, and stocking the shower facilities with moldy towels. This usually backfires on them as teams get angry and take out their frustrations on the Violators, who can't do much about it. This game will be Darren McFadden's coming out party and Tom Brady will throw a pair of TD passes just to let people know he's in the building. Virden will begin their long season with a substantial loss that will make Eli Manning wish he had signed a cheaper contract with Gwinnett back in the day. **Pick: YORK**

DEATH VALLEY @ CHINO (line – CONVICTS by 1)

The Big House historically lends a hand to the Convicts on Opening Day and it will do so again this week. Unfortunately, it will not be enough of a hand to pull Jay Cutler up off the turf. The Undertakers' world class pass rush will knock the Chino quarterback down when they are not grinding him into the grass and the Convicts' offence will stall repeatedly in the red zone. If Drew Brees can avoid mistakes, he'll get enough done on offence to prevail. **Pick: DEATH VALLEY**

IOWA CITY @ LOS ANGELES (line – KNIGHTS by 5)

These traditional rivals usually play each other close regardless of where they sit in the standings but I expect the Knights to come out forcefully on defence in their home opener and keep the Cubs and Sam Bradford under their thumb from the start. The Knights will ease in Josh Freeman with a ground-focused game plan and play action passes. The Cubs will counter with Arian Foster but will soon have to abandon the running game in order to play catch-up. **Pick: LOS ANGELES**

COWTOWN @ PICKERING (line – SPARTANS by 7)

The defending champions are heavy favourites at home, as they should be, but bettors should pause before blindly taking the points against the Corn Kings. Both teams will need to establish the running game before they will gain real success in the passing game. The advantage here goes to Chris Johnson over Maurice Jones-Drew, but if (and it's a big "IF") the Cowtown run defence holds long enough for their offence to grab an early lead, the whole dynamic could change. The Corn Kings want Matt Cassel to pass the ball and in that scenario they believe they have the edge. Realistically, the more likely scenario is the reverse, but it is still worth pausing to think about before laying your money down on Pickering. **Pick: PICKERING**

DURHAM @ MARKHAM (line – THUNDER LIZARDS by 8)

The North Stars, no matter how bad they are, make the Thunder Lizards nervous. It will be an emotional home opener at the Dawg Pound because it always is and the fan base is understandably filled with angst at having almost no hope for a victory. But it is precisely these types of conditions that bring out the best in Markham and their head coach and the worst in Philip Rivers and his head coach. Once Durham tightens up, the second-guessing and self-recriminations start and the Durham sideline becomes very morgue-like. This silence actually feeds the whooping and hollering and endless props on the Markham sideline and, next thing you know, there's an upset in the making. Football is such an emotional game at its core. I still think Durham will win, but I expect Markham to hang around. **PICK: MARKHAM**

SOUTH CAROLINA @ SCARBOROUGH (line – BLUE EAGLES by 11)

The only thing I can see getting in the way of an exclamatory opening day statement by the Blue Eagles is the entire team missing the bus to Bluffs Stadium. **Pick: SCARBOROUGH**

GWINNETT @ GARLAND (line – GLADIATORS by 6)

Somebody in the league must have thought it would be a good idea to give the Gladiators and the Blue Eagles warm up games before facing off against each other in Week Two. Hopefully for Gwinnett's sake they will not look at this game that way. Garland is always more dangerous at home and they will be confident simply because they have not yet internalized their inadequacy at this early stage of the season. Imagine a scenario where Gwinnett controls the play, moves the ball, but coughs it up a couple of times in the red zone because the Mustangs' *'Thoroughdead'* defence is trying to impress their home fans by playing like Tazmanian Devils on crystal meth. That's how I think this game will go and I expect the Glads to win by five. **Pick: GARLAND**