

Football Weekly – BY MATTHEW HATFIELD  
National Football League – Thursday, September 4<sup>th</sup>, 2008



**NBC Season Opener: Thursday – 9-4-08**

Washington @ NY Giants      SU Pick: Washington 20-14      ATS Pick: WSH +5

**WEEK 1 PICKS: Sunday – 9-7-08**

Detroit @ Atlanta	SU Pick: Detroit 31-19	ATS Pick: DET -3
Cincinnati @ Baltimore	SU Pick: Baltimore 13-10	ATS Pick: BLT +1
Seattle @ Buffalo	SU Pick: Buffalo 21-14	ATS Pick: BUF -1
Houston @ Pittsburgh	SU Pick: Pittsburgh 19-14	ATS Pick: HOU +6.5
Jacksonville @ Tennessee	SU Pick: Jacksonville 23-16	ATS Pick: JAG -3
Kansas City @ New England	SU Pick: N. England 35-13	ATS Pick: NE -16.5
New York Jets @ Miami	SU Pick: NY Jets 24-7	ATS Pick: NYJ -3
Tampa Bay @ New Orleans	SU Pick: N. Orleans 24-17	ATS Pick: NO -3.5
<u>St. Louis @ Philadelphia</u>	<u>SU Pick: Philly 27-13</u>	<u>ATS Pick: PHI -7</u>
Arizona @ San Francisco	SU Pick: Arizona 30-20	ATS Pick: AZ -3
Carolina @ San Diego	SU Pick: San Diego 34-17	ATS Pick: SD -9.5
<u>Dallas @ Cleveland</u>	<u>SU Pick: Dallas 28-24</u>	<u>ATS Pick: DAL -3.5</u>
Chicago @ Indianapolis	SU Pick: Indy 24-7	ATS Pick: IND -9.5

**ESPN Monday Night Football Doubleheader: Monday - 9-8-08**

Minnesota @ Green Bay	SU Pick: Minnesota 21-15	ATS Pick: MN +3
Denver @ Oakland	SU Pick: Oakland 13-6	ATS Pick: OAK +2

**LOCKS:** Philadelphia -7 (*POTW*), Arizona -3, Indianapolis -9.5, OV 41.5 DET/ATL and NY Jets -3

**UPSET SPECIAL:** Minnesota SU & +3

**BREAKING DOWN SUNDAY'S GAMES:**



### **Detroit Lions @ Atlanta Falcons**



In the all-time series, the Detroit Lions lead it 23-9 and would like to extend their series lead against an Atlanta Falcons team which will see the coaching debut of Mike Smith as well as quarterback debut of rookie Matt Ryan, their first round draft pick from Boston College. Receiving weapons such as Calvin Johnson, Roy Williams, Mike Furrey and Shaun McDonald give Detroit an upper hand in what has the potential to be a high scoring affair, but Atlanta can win if new running back Michael ‘Burner’ Turner, formerly of the San Diego Chargers, performs very well. Lions quarterback Jon Kitna was sacked an NFL-high 51 times a year ago, so it’ll be important that Detroit’s o-line keeps guys like John Abraham off him... **My Pick – Lions 31, Falcons 19**



### **Cincinnati Bengals @ Baltimore Ravens**



For the second year in a row, the Bengals and Ravens open the season against one another. Last year on ESPN Monday Night Football, Cincinnati got the better of Baltimore at Paul Brown Stadium, and they’ve won six of the last seven meetings overall. The ‘buzz’ with this game coming in is the name of change of Bengals receiver Chad Ocho Cinco, once known as Chad Johnson. For Baltimore, it’ll be the first career start for rookie quarterback Joe Flacco, a Delaware product. Cincy will look to put it in the air with QB Carson Palmer, aiming for Ocho Cinco and T.J. Houshmandzadeh. As for the Ravens, their goal will be to keep it on the ground mostly and rookie tailback Ray Rice out of Rutgers could make an impact in this game. In the end, Baltimore’s defense at home should be able to get the job done... **My Pick – Ravens 13, Bengals 10**



### **Seattle Seahawks @ Buffalo Bills**



The Seahawks will be without the services of their two best receivers, Deion Branch and Bobby Engram. Branch is out with a knee injury, while Engram is sidelined with a shoulder injury. Seattle has made five straight postseason appearances, including capturing four NFC West division titles in a row under Head Coach Mike Holmgren, who’s in his final season with the Seahawks. Holmgren has 170 victories, fifth most in league in history. The recent record of teams traveling from west to east or east to west time zones is 2-15. Special teams could be the difference in this game; the Bills have two excellent return men in Roscoe Parrish and Terrence McGee. At home, Buffalo will take advantage of some Seattle injuries and the Hawks making a long trip... **My Pick – Bills 21, Seahawks 14**



### **Houston Texans @ Pittsburgh Steelers**



Coach Gary Kubiak and the Houston Texans come in as kind of a trendy pick to pull an upset of a Pittsburgh Steelers team that enters its second year under Head Coach Mike Tomlin, but didn't finish last season the way they had hoped. However, Pittsburgh has the longest active win streak – five – on Kickoff Weekend of any team in the league. In order to come away with the upset, the Texans need their defense to rise to the occasion and allow them to win a defensive struggle. Third-year defensive end Mario Williams registered 14 sacks and has Pro Bowl linebacker DeMeco Ryans behind him to clean up as a tackle machine. Pittsburgh's offense has a few more weapons with QB Ben Roethlisberger, RB Willie Parker, WR's Hines Ward and Santonio Holmes. They'll likely be able to run the ball better... **My Pick – Steelers 19, Texans 14**



### **Jacksonville Jaguars @ Tennessee Titans**



When Tennessee visited Jacksonville in last year's season opener and won 13-10, the Titans rushed for over 240 yards while keeping the Jaguars' 1-2 punch of Fred Taylor and Maurice Jones-Drew to 72 yards. Can they duplicate that performance again? They may need to sprinkle in a bit of the passing game with quarterback Vince Young to come away victorious again. The Jags will be without center Brad Meester with a biceps injury, so running the game could be a bit tougher than usual without his presence up front. Another player they won't have is Richard Collier, an offensive lineman that was shot recently. Jacksonville's defense is the fiercer group in my opinion, so I expect them to win by a touchdown late... **My Pick – Jaguars 23, Titans 16**



### **Kansas City Chiefs @ New England Patriots**



This could be the mismatch of the day, although the Chiefs drafted extremely well last April and should make a move back up in the division come 2009. Herman Edwards' team will have their hands full when they make the trip to Foxboro to take on a Patriots bunch that went 16-0 during the regular season last year, but is still smarting over being shocked by the Giants in the Super Bowl. KC must get a mistake-free performance from quarterback Brodie Croyle and control the clock with running back Larry Johnson. On defense, they have to get after quarterback Tom Brady without Jared Allen, now who is in Minnesota. Brady, Randy Moss, Wes Welker and company are too much for the Chiefs to pull an upset... **My Pick – Patriots 35, Chiefs 13**



### **New York Jets @ Miami Dolphins**



There's been much anticipation for the first start as a member of the New York Jets for quarterback Brett Favre. After falling to the eventual Super Bowl Champion New York Giants in the NFC Championship Game, Favre retired as a member of the Green Bay Packers, but then decided he wanted to return and will make his 254<sup>th</sup> consecutive regular season start when the Jets visit the Dolphins on Sunday. His

weapons – such as running back Thomas Jones and receiver Jerricho Cotchery headlining the group – aren't spectacular, but they can get the job done against a young Dolphins team. Plus, New York upgraded both its offensive line, with the off-season acquisitions of Alan Faneca and Damein Woody, as well as the defense by drafting pass rusher Vernon Gholston and run stuffer Kris Jenkins. Miami starts Chad Pennington at quarterback, the ex-Jets starting signal caller... **My Pick – Jets 24, Dolphins 7**



### **Tampa Bay Buccaneers @ New Orleans Saints**

Looking to rebound after missing the playoffs last year and return to 2006 form when they were NFC runner-ups, the New Orleans Saints take on the defending NFC South division Champs, the Tampa Bay Buccaneers. Saints quarterback Drew Brees is coming off back-to-back 4000 yard passing seasons and got another quality target to throw to in the off-season with the addition of former Giants tight end Jeremy Shockey. Tampa Bay's aggressive defense has a solid secondary with the likes of veteran corner Ronde Barber, Philip Buchanon and impact safety Tanard Jackson. If they're able to slow down the Saints' air attack and be balanced offensively, they'll get a hard-fought road win. The x-factor in my opinion is Reggie Bush, who might get used more as a pass catcher out of the backfield and moved around quite a bit to showcase his versatility... **My Pick – Saints 24, Bucs 17**



### **St. Louis Rams @ Philadelphia Eagles**

Perhaps one of the sleepers to reach the Super Bowl out of the NFC is Philadelphia. Andy Reid's Eagles played competitively in December, even though they were out of the playoff mix. St. Louis, on the other hand, would like to be a surprise team and make the playoffs. The Rams didn't win a game last year until Veteran's Day came and went. Offensively, they have a chance to be pretty good with running back Steven Jackson and WR Tory Holt as long as quarterback Marc Bulger stays healthy. Their defense still has a lot of question marks, so facing a Philadelphia offense that's still healthy and potent with Pro Bowl caliber players in QB Donovan McNabb and RB Brian Westbrook should give them some problems... **My Pick – Eagles 27, Rams 13**



### **Arizona Cardinals @ San Francisco 49ers**

San Francisco swept the season series with Arizona last season, despite the Cardinals finishing with a better record as they went 8-8 overall compared to the 49ers' 5-11 mark. Both of the Cardinals' two losses to San Fran were devastating, heart-breaking defeats; the first came with Alex Smith, now the Niners' backup, leading the team down the field for the game-winning touchdown with less than a minute to play

while the second came with Arizona falling in overtime in a game where Kurt Warner threw for over 400 yards. Warner, whose 21 touchdown passes were the most by any quarterback in the NFL over the final eight games of the 2007 season, was named the Cards' starting signal caller by Head Coach Ken Whisenhunt instead of choosing Matt Leinart, their first round draft pick in 2006. Receivers Larry Fitzgerald and Anquan Boldin ought to make enough plays for a road win... **My Pick – Cards 30, Niners 20**



### **Carolina Panthers @ San Diego Chargers**



If looking for a possible 'Game of the Week' that not too many people are talking about, this could be the one. San Diego, which had the league's best record two years ago and reached the AFC Conference Championship last January, has legitimate Super Bowl aspirations. Carolina missed the playoffs in the second year in a row, but they too would like to be a title threat and make the Super Bowl for the first time since the 2004-05 campaign. Quarterback Jake Delhomme returns from a serious injury for the Panthers. Their ground tandem of DeAngelo Williams and rookie Jonathan Stewart need to provide support in the absence of receiver Steve Smith, who has been suspended for two games. San Diego running back LaDainian Tomlinson not only is searching for his first ring, but his second MVP in three years. At this current time, San Diego's offense offers more big-play capability right now than the Panthers without Smith... **My Pick – Chargers 34, Panthers 17**



### **Dallas Cowboys @ Cleveland Browns**



Dallas posted the best record among all NFC teams a year ago. Unfortunately for Wade Phillips, Tony Romo, Terrell Owens and the rest of the Dallas Cowboys, their postseason was short-lived with a home loss to the Giants. The Browns were headed for the playoffs when they suffered a late-season loss to sub-.500 Cincinnati. Both teams have big expectations this year, especially the Cowboys. Safety Brodney Pool won't be playing for Cleveland as he's out with a concussion. Look for Dallas to exploit the Browns' defense deep down the middle of the field with Terrell Owens, who's one receiving touchdown shy of tying Cris Carter for second most all-time. Cleveland also doesn't have return man Joshua Cribbs, someone that's capable of running back a kick or punt for a touchdown and surely could use in a game like this one. Derek Anderson will have to find targets Braylon Edwards and Kellen Winslow Jr. early and often for Cleveland to get a victory and keep pace, plus the Browns defense has to come up with a takeaway or two... **My Pick – Cowboys 28, Browns 24**



### **Chicago Bears @ Indianapolis Colts**



The health and status of Colts quarterback Peyton Manning, a former league MVP, is the top storyline going into the NBC Sunday Night Football matchup between two teams that faced off in Super Bowl XLI (41). Like then, the Bears still have an unsettled picture at quarterback, and their defense is what makes them tick. Chicago won't have the luxury of having rookie offensive tackle Chris Williams out of Vanderbilt, which means Colts defensive ends Dwight Freeney and Robert Mathis will be looking to apply pressure on QB Kyle Orton. Unless Manning really has problems with his offensive line, which is without injured center Jeff Saturday for the season, he should have be able to dink and dunk and methodically move his team down the field against the Bears. Joseph Addai and Reggie Wayne want to show they are two of the best players in the sport at their respective position... **My Pick – Colts 24, Bears 7**



### **Minnesota Vikings @ Green Bay Packers**



To kickoff ESPN's Monday Night Football doubleheader, the Aaron Rodgers officially begins in Green Bay as the Packers host the Minnesota Vikings. Brett Favre is gone and the expectations are high for Rodgers and a Packers team that was one win away from reaching the Super Bowl last season. Minnesota came on late, thanks in large part to the outstanding rushing of Adrian Peterson, the reigning NFL Rookie of the Year. Additionally, the Vikings made a big off-season splash when they brought in Jared Allen from Kansas City. Allen led all players with 15.5 sacks a season ago, and he's joined by two terrific defensive tackles on the d-line – Kevin Williams and Pat Williams. Green Bay's offense may have trouble, especially if they are unable to protect Rodgers and run the ball effectively with Ryan Grant, who's out to show he's no one-year wonder... **My Pick – Vikings 21, Packers 15**



### **Denver Broncos @ Oakland Raiders**



Second-year quarterback JaMarcus Russell and rookie running back Darren McFadden headline an Oakland Raiders attack that tries to begin Lane Kiffin's second year as Head Coach with a bang as they host their division rival, the Denver Broncos, coached by Mike Shanahan. Center Tom Nalen and running back Ryan Torain are out due to injuries for the Broncos, and Oakland will hope for its defensive line, anchored by Tommy Kelley and sack master Derrick Burgess, to cause havoc. Denver believes quarterback Jay Cutler is going to enjoy a breakout season, but putting up fantastic numbers in Week One may be a tough task without his favorite target, receiver Brandon Marshall. Unless the Broncos can uncover another hidden gem at the running back position, Oakland could be in position to rally behind their home crowd and win a low-scoring, defensive battle... **My Pick – Raiders 13, Broncos 6**