

## **Monday Morning Analysis – BY MATTHEW HATFIELD**

### **NFL – Monday, September 10, 2007**

**W**elcome to the inaugural edition of Monday Morning Analysis for the 2007-08 NFL season! All season long, I'll be shelling out stats and sharing my thoughts on everything pro football following the weekend's action. This was the first time since 2003 that in Week 1 there were three games decided by a field goal in the minute of regulation or in overtime. Here's my recap of an exciting football Sunday.....

**Denver 15, Buffalo 14:** Sadly, the news from this game – and really the storyline from Week 1 – was a scary injury that happened right after half-time. Buffalo Bills backup tight end and special teams contributor Kevin Everett, a draft choice out of Miami in 2005, suffered a cervical spine injury and underwent emergency surgery Sunday night. More important than whether he'll be able to ever play football again, we hope he'll be able to walk again. On top of that, Buffalo had a heart-breaking loss as QB J.P. Losman attempted a bomb pass for Lee Evans on 3<sup>rd</sup> & 5 with less than a minute and a half to go to give Denver the ball back, the Broncos trailing 14-12. Denver trailed practically the whole game, but second-year QB Jay Cutler, a first round draft pick out of Vanderbilt in 2006, did his best John Elway impersonation leading the Broncos back. Cutler threw for 304 yards, got Denver in position for a 42-yard game-winning field goal, which longtime vet Jason Elam hit as time expired. Travis Henry, the ex-Bills tailback who spent last season in Tennessee and rushed for over 1000 yards there, carried the rock 23 times for 139 yards and caught three passes for 44 yards, making his debut in a Denver uniform a good one. Mike Shanahan and company out-gained the home guys 470-184 in this one, and that really negated the opposition's big play - a beautiful 75-yard punt return for a touchdown by Buffalo's Roscoe Parrish.

**Houston 20, Kansas City 3:** The first start for new Houston Texans starting quarterback Matt Schaub, formerly of Atlanta, proved to be successful as they jumped in front of Kansas City 10-0 and never glanced back. Super Mario, otherwise known as Mario Williams, delivered in the first game of his second season. Williams, the #1 overall select of the 2006 NFL Draft, recorded two sacks and recovered a fumble which he returned for a touchdown. At 6-foot-7, 291-pounds, his size was too much for a KC offensive line that's no longer as strong as it once was to handle. On offense, Schaub finished with a 101.5 quarterback rating and found top target Andre Johnson for a 77-yard scoring strike. It looks like Houston found themselves another good one in rookie wideout Jacoby Jones, who's developing into their #2 option behind Johnson. As far as the Chiefs go, Herman Edwards didn't go to Larry Johnson nearly as much as most thought. We knew Johnson's workload might be decreased, but only ten carries for 43 yards seldom cuts it, especially with a below average passing game.

**New England 38, NY Jets 14:** Chad Pennington got off to a great start, but in the end, he was outdone by Tom Brady, Randy Moss and the New England' Patriots

suddenly potent offensive attack. Worst of all, Pennington got hurt towards the end of the game and may be on the shelf now for a couple of weeks. That means Head Coach Eric Mangini will be forced to start Kellen Clemens, a second-year player out of Oregon with limited to no playing experience, against a stingy Baltimore Ravens defense next week... provided Pennington can't start next week on the road. Brady was his usual brilliant self, completing 22 of 28 passes for 297 yards and three touchdowns. Over half of his passing yards were accounted for by Moss, who snared nine passes for 183 yards and a score – his first in a Pats uniform. It's safe to say that Mr. Moss has revitalized his career and is playing like the guy that we saw dominate at times in Minnesota. Also, possibly the play of the day, came when Ellis Hobbs returned a kickoff 108 yards for a touchdown – the longest in NFL history. New England is in great shape and will host San Diego on Sunday Night Football in Week 2 in what will be a 'must-see' showdown.

**Minnesota 24, Atlanta 3:** Few games were less interesting than this one. Actually, this one had the least appeal to me. No Michael Vick, who's out for the year (dog-fighting) and possibly longer. Minnesota's starting quarterback is Tavaris Jackson – not exactly a household name and certainly somebody the average NFL fan hasn't heard of, unless they are infatuated with fantasy football *{even then – you probably haven't heard of the guy}*. And Joey Harrington laid an egg in his Falcons debut. Harrington got picked off early by DT Kevin Williams, who's pushing 315 pounds and ran it back for a touchdown. Later on, Antoine Winfield victimized Harrington and ran in his pick to the end zone. Even their kicker, Matt Prater, missed a 44-yard field goal early that could've kept them in the game and gained them some momentum on the road. Things got worse as Adrian Peterson, the Vikings' rookie out of Oklahoma, burned them for 185 all-purpose yards, including a 60-yard touchdown reception. The Vikes had five sacks as well. On the bright side, DeAngelo Hall could be Atlanta's lone Pro Bowl representative; he had an interception.

**Tennessee 13, Jacksonville 10:** Jacksonville was a disappointment in Week 1. They put together one of the top ground attacks in the league last year with the 1-2 punch of Maurice Jones-Drew and Fred Taylor. In this game they rushed for only 72 yards as a team while Tennessee gashed them for a franchise record on the ground. Chris Brown, a perennial backup, stepped in and gained 175 yards with LenDale White adding support on 66 yards. Keep in mind that Jacksonville has had one of the Top 10 run defenses in the sport over the past couple years, too. Tennessee really did a sound job in the trenches, much to my surprise and many others'. Other than Rashean Mathis making an interception of the Titans' Vince Young – who didn't do a whole lot in the game with 78 yards through the air – little went right for Jack Del Rio's Jags. This is one of those home games that the Jags aren't supposed to lose, and as we've mentioned in the past, they can ill-afford to lose divisional games to the Titans and Texans because when they do, it's tough for them to make a big win over Indy or another AFC playoff-bound team stick.

**Washington 16, Miami 13 (OT):** For a while there Joe Gibbs and company thought they were going to lose another tough home season opener as they did a year ago when Minnesota beat them. Washington received bad news early when starting right

tackle Jon Jansen was carted away with an injury, and now it's been learned that he will be out for the year. As far as the rest of their o-line is concerned, new left guard Pete Kendall performed well and appears to be a solid addition as Clinton Portis ran tough and with a chip on his shoulder. Offensively, Washington put up 400 yards of offense on a Dolphins defense that ranked in the Top 5 in several categories. The Dolphins weren't bad by any means on defense either as they were led by DE Jason Taylor, the reigning NFL Defensive Player of the Year, and LB Zach Thomas, who did an excellent job sniffing out a reverse and played at a solid level. Antwaan Randle El had a great day with five catches for 162 yards. On defense, Rocky McIntosh gave them a lift and corners Carlos Rogers and Shawn Springs were sharp in tackling. The Dolphins offense, quarterbacked by ex-Redskins QB Trent Green, simply settled for the check downs, dink and dunks at times. Their running game didn't do much and they were most effective when Chris Chambers was matched up vs. Rogers. In overtime, Miami got caught blitzing and that came back to bite them when Chris Cooley made his first catch of the day on a key 3<sup>rd</sup> & 7 play. Shaun Suisham drilled the game-winning field goal. Washington has some pieces in place, but they need to generate a better pass rush and can't put the game in the hands of QB Jason Campbell to win or lose.

**Green Bay 16, Philadelphia 13:** For many, one of the most surprising results of the day was Brett Favre and the Packers defeating the Donovan McNabb-led Eagles. But neither Favre nor McNabb was at their best, although Favre starts out 1-0 and tied John Elway's career record for the most wins by a starting quarterback. After the Packers jumped out in front 10-0 as McNabb was picked off by Nick Barnett and Mason Crosby hit a 53-yard field goal, McNabb found Jason Avant near the end of the half to tie things at 10-apiece. Philly eventually was done in by its poor special teams play, particularly fumbling two punt returns and nearly a third. That's something Andy Reid and company must get ironed out to be the cream of the crop in the NFC. Crosby connected on a 42-yard game-winning field goal at the end of regulation. Green Bay has a great defensive line, but lacking a stud wide receiver {Donald Driver is a notch below that elite level... plus his supporting cast isn't that mighty} and an effective run game could be what holds them back from going to the playoffs.

**Carolina 27, St. Louis 13:** Earning their first opening week win since 2003, the Panthers beat the Rams for a second straight year and did it with superb balance on offense. Steve Smith burned St. Louis' defense for a 68-yard touchdown in this game, eerily similar to the game-winning TD catch he made on a slant in the playoffs at St. Louis about four years ago. Carolina QB Jake Delhomme also connected with Drew Carter twice for scoring plays. On the ground, the 1-2 punch of DeShaun Foster and DeAngelo Williams did quite well, accumulating 156 yards on 32 attempts. Surprisingly, Rams RB Steven Jackson (58 yards rushing, 1 catch for 3 yards), who set the bold goal to set an NFL-record in rushing/receiving yards this season, finished well shy of 100 for the game and fumbled on consecutive plays. The worst news of the day for the Rams might not have been that they lost but rather that star left tackle Orlando Pace, a future Hall-of-Famer, left the game with an arm injury.

**Pittsburgh 34, Cleveland 7:** Once the Steelers grabbed a 17-0 lead in the coaching debut of Mike Tomlin, we knew it would soon be the start of a very frustrating season for Romeo Crennel and the Cleveland Browns. A 27-point home loss to begin the season is never a good thing. Any positive to take out of this? No... except that they are closer to getting Brady Quinn in there as the starter. Other than Antwan Peek recovering a Willie Parker fumble, there wasn't much cheering at all in the Dawg Pound. Pittsburgh dominated from start to finish as Ben Roethlisberger threw for a career-high four touchdown passes, finding Hines Ward, Santonio Holmes, Heath Miller and Matt Speath each once apiece. We might not know yet whether the Steelers are back among the elite in the AFC, but what we do know is that Cleveland remains in the AFC North cellar.

**San Diego 14, Chicago 3:** The Game of the Day turned out to be a classic defensive grudge-match. I have to give Chicago's defense a lot of credit because for three quarters they played extremely well. In fact, San Diego scored an NFL-high 222 first half points last year and the Bears shut them out in the first half. That's right – the high-powered Chargers offense scored zip through 30 minutes of action. But San Diego was moving the ball well; they had a 106-22 yard edge through the opening period. It wasn't as much a matter of they couldn't move the ball as it was they were falling short of the end zone time after time. Finally, they were able to break through when LaDainian Tomlinson threw his seventh career touchdown pass, finding TE Antonio Gates for a 7-3 San Diego lead. Tomlinson now trails only Walter Payton (8TD tosses) for the most touchdown passes among non-quarterbacks in league history. Not long after that, Tomlinson got his 101<sup>st</sup> career TD run, putting the game out of reach for an enigmatic Bears offense quarterbacked by the awfully inconsistent and erratic Rex Grossman. Chicago didn't do much on the ground in this game, but kudos to Chargers NT Jamal Williams for manhandling the Bears' interior offensive line. Marlon McCree, the same guy that fumbled his interception of the Patriots in the playoffs, made a key pick of Grossman in the end zone to prevent Chicago from tacking on another field goal or possibly scoring a touchdown. A couple of interesting things from this game – Ron Turner, Chicago's offensive coordinator, is the brother of Chargers Head Coach Norv Turner, while ex-Bears defensive coordinator Ron Rivera is with Norv and the Lightning Bolts. It wasn't a pretty offensive display for the league's top offensive from a year ago by any means, but all that counts is that San Diego got a win. They'll need to be in much better form against the Patriots, and given how much they have been thinking about that re-match, it's a decent possibility they will be.

**Detroit 36, Oakland 21:** Calvin Johnson's much anticipated NFL debut was pleasant for Lions fans as he hauled in four passes for 70 yards and a touchdown in the team's season-opening victory. QB Jon Kitna started the game 11-for-14 and finished with 289 yards and 3TD's. He's got four quality options through the air that include Johnson, Roy Williams, Mike Furrey (the NFC's reception leader from a year ago) and Shaun McDonald – the surprise guy that had six catches for 90 yards and a score. McDonald was a player in St. Louis when Mike Martz was there. With that, and an egregious Detroit running game that's not much better, in mind – look for some four-wide formations to continue. Another plus was the fact that Kitna got sacked only once, so the

Lions o-line did a steady job. Mike Williams, an ex-first round pick by the Lions, didn't fare all too well in his Raiders debut, catching just one pass for 11 yards. Detroit's secondary was up in shambles coming in and it kind of stayed that way as Oakland rebounded from a 17-0 deficit to grab a 21-20 advantage at the 7:43 mark when QB Josh McCown found fullback Justin Griffith, a one-time member of the Atlanta Falcons, for a touchdown. Ronald Curry turned out to be the bright spot for Oakland, grabbing ten passes for 133 yards and a TD. He'll have a chance to catch upwards of 90 balls in this offense now.

**Seattle 20, Tampa Bay 6:** Did you know these two teams actually entered the league the same year? Both broke into the NFL in 1976. It was Really, this game didn't hold my interest that much as Tampa Bay shocked me with their 6-0 lead at the end of the first quarter and did nothing after that point. Seattle scored 20 unanswered points over the final three periods to get out to a 1-0 start, defeating Jon Gruden's Buccaneers. Luke McCown ended up replacing Jeff Garcia at quarterback in the second half for Tampa Bay. In order to be successful and effective on offense, the Bucs must get productive rushing outings from Cadillac Williams. They didn't on Sunday as he rushed for 60 yards on only 12 carries. He's got to see the rock anywhere between 20-25 times with their passing attack not being much of a factor, especially when on the road when you know they are going to get blitzed a ton as the case was Sunday vs. an aggressive Seahawks front seven. Linebackers Julian Peterson (7 solo tackles, 2 sacks, forced fumble) and Lofa Tatupu (8Tack. 2FF) led the defensive charge for Seattle. Shaun Alexander rushed for over 100 yards and did so quietly. Against his old team, Joey Galloway caught five passes for 72 yards in a losing effort.

**Dallas 45, NY Giants 35:** What turned out to be a shoot-out, the Dallas Cowboys prevailed 45-35 when Tony Romo (345Yds.) threw his fourth and final touchdown pass, hitting #4 wide receiver Sam Hurd for the dagger late. New York came out firing early when QB Eli Manning completed a 60-yard touchdown pass to Plaxico Burress. A bad snap on the PAT left the Giants leading only 6-0. Another moment that hurt the G-men was when Amani Toomer failed to get his feet in bounds on a long throw by Manning. The Giants could've been up 13-3 at that point. Instead, on a Marion Barber III touchdown run, Dallas claimed a 10-6 advantage. To be perfectly honest, neither defense showed me much in this game. Certainly not enough to be a Super Bowl contender – even for a Dallas team with plenty of offensive talent to go around and perhaps win the NFC East. Should we be too surprised the Giants were torched in this game? Not really. Michael Strahan reported to the team late and last year's group finished in the bottom 10 in points allowed as well as total defense for the first time since 1980. Injuries are the most concerning sign for the Giants. An early report says that Eli is out for a month. If that's the case then they could be in trouble against their next two opponents – Green Bay and Washington – which some felt were good chances for wins. RB Brandon Jacobs sprained his MCL and will be definitely be on the shelf for the next few weeks. Lastly, DE Osi Umenyiora, the key guy in New York's pass rush, also suffered a knee injury.