

2006-07 NFL Regular Season Top Ten Games: BY MATTHEW HATFIELD

Picking out ten games for the 2006-07 NFL regular season is always a tricky thing to do. You never know how good a certain team will be in Week 17. Because what might seem like a great game now may not necessarily be one in four months. However, I've crunched the numbers, schedules, stats and even munched on some chips to figure out for all of you what are the ten best games from an intrigue standpoint.

September 7th --- Miami @ Pittsburgh – The first official regular season game of the 2006 campaign, and first regular season game for the NFL's return to NBC, is here. We get our first 'meaningful' look at new Dolphins QB Daunte Culpepper off his injury from last year, as well as our first glance at the defending Super Bowl Champs, led by QB Ben Roethlisberger. Of course, everybody has a close eye on Roethlisberger in wake of the off-season motorcycle accident. In many ways, this season opener interests me a lot more than last year's that featured the Patriots hosting the Raiders.

September 10th --- Indianapolis @ NY Giants – Brother vs. brother. Peyton and Eli Manning square off for the first time ever at the NFL level – or any level for that matter. Well, that is if you don't count the backyard football games with dad Archie when they were kids. With the defenses being about equal, each possessing a few feared pass rushers, and the game being in New York, I give the Giants a decent chance to win the 'Manning Bowl.' Think about it – they have Tiki Barber running the ball and the Colts lost Edgerrin James to Arizona, plus recently found out James Mungro will be out for the year.

October 16th --- Chicago @ Arizona – Monday Night Football hasn't come to 'Zona since 1999 when San Francisco edged those Cardinals 24-10. Speaking of edges, Arizona now has one in new tailback Edgerrin James, completing an explosive offense. On the other side, Chicago is known for having one of the league's best defenses. Great game potentially as far as o, it's worth mentioning the Bears have lost each of their past four MNF games.

November 5th --- Indianapolis @ New England – Up until last year when the Colts went into Foxboro and FINALLY beat the Patriots, Indy had more problems trying to defeat New England than Boston people have avoiding re-runs of *Cheers*. Okay, not one of my greatest comparisons, but it was the best I could come up with on short notice. To topple them again, it'll take a sharp effort by the defense to slow down Tom Brady and company testing that Colts secondary.

November 23rd --- Tampa Bay @ Dallas – Why is this game on the list? None other than Turkey Day, that's why. For this Thanksgiving, we're thankful for T.O. (*really? Are you sure about that?*), Cadillac Williams, the QB battle between Drew Bledsoe and Chris Simms, and the coaching matchup we'll have with Jon Gruden (a.k.a. Chucky) opposite Bill Parcells (a.k.a. the Tuna). Make sure you save a side for this with

the bird, stuffing, mashed potatoes, cranberry sauce and all those other food fixings. Or at least room for dessert.

December 17th --- Pittsburgh @ Carolina – Both teams nearly met in the Super Bowl last February. As things turned out, Carolina fell to Seattle in the NFC Championship Game and the Steelers went on to take the title. At this point in the season, both may be playoff bound and on a collision course to meet in Super Bowl XLI.

December 24th --- San Diego @ Seattle – Why is this X-Mas Eve battle worth watching? I'll tell you why. Because each could be fighting for a playoff spot or postseason positioning. Another reason, perhaps even better one, is you get to check out two of the game's best running backs in LaDainian Tomlinson of the Chargers and reigning NFL MVP Shaun Alexander for the Seahawks.

December 25th --- Philadelphia @ Dallas – It's Christmas Day. You have the Cowboys and Terrell Owens, going up against his former team, and Donovan McNabb and the Eagles. What more could one ask for? This game being played in Philadelphia rather than Big D'. What was the NFL thinking? Open the packages earlier so you can watch this one be unwrapped, starting at 5PM ET on NBC.

December 30th --- NY Giants @ Washington – Ever since the schedule came out, I've been all over this one, saying it has playoff implications written all over. These teams split two regular season meetings a year ago and it's hard to think either a division title or wild card spot won't be on the line. I'd also expect the game to be closer than the 36-0 Giants beat down last October and the 35-20 Redskins victory from Christmas Eve.

December 31st --- Jacksonville @ Kansas City – Could a playoff spot be on the line on New Year's Eve? Quite possibly. Jacksonville went 12-4, but part of that was attributed to a weak schedule. Two seasons ago they narrowly missed out. Meanwhile, with one or two more wins, the Chiefs would've been in the playoffs last year. This may be the AFC's version of Giants/Redskins where the winner gets in and the loser might find themselves out. I'm interested to see how the Jaguars defense, led by the d-tackle combo of John Henderson and Marcus Stroud, go about slowing down Larry Johnson.