

## TRES HISTORY

I guess technically history is made every time anything happens anywhere, but the kind of history that I'm talking about has more to do with setting records. In that sense, this week's games were rich with history:

The injury-ravaged, scandal-engulfed Minnesota Vikings went to New Jersey and defeated the Giants while becoming the only team in the league's storied history to ever return a kickoff, punt and interception for a touchdown all in the same game. The Vikings (who were 0-4 on the road entering the game) beat the odds by winning despite allowing 405 yards of offense while gaining only 137 yards of their own.

Nathan Vasher of the Chicago Bears is now in the NFL's record books. If you saw the game or any sports highlight show then you know that Vasher fielded an ill-advised 52 yard field goal attempt by San Francisco's Joe Nedney (coach Mike Nolan never should have allowed him to attempt such a long kick in gale force winds) and returned it 108 yards for a touchdown – the longest play in the league's history.

In yet another victory, the still undefeated Indianapolis Colts enjoyed a day rich with history. Peyton Manning completed 26 of 35 passes for 297 yards and three touchdowns, while Marvin Harrison caught seven passes for 108 yards and a touchdown, and Edgerrin James rushed 26 times for 122 yards and a touchdown. Those statistics represent several records. Manning and Harrison have now combined for 10,034 yards and 90 touchdowns on 755 completions – all NFL records. They are the only duo in the history of the league to cross the 10,000 yards mark. That's quite an accomplishment when you consider all the excellent quarterbacks and wide receivers that have played the game of professional football, and they're not even anywhere near retirement! Edgerrin James got in on the records, too. He's now tied with the great Franco Harris for eighth on the all-time list with 47 career 100-yard games. But wait! There's more! James and Harrison gained over 100 yards each in the same game for the 21<sup>st</sup> time, breaking the record of 20 formerly held by the Hall of Fame tandem of Emmitt Smith and Michael Irvin.

OK, I've had about all the history I can take, so let's get back to the future...

### Indianapolis Colts (9-0) @ Cincinnati Bengals (7-2)

The Colts finally face what I consider to be their first real test of the season – a road game against a bona fide winning team with an explosive offense and a big play defense. These are not the Bungles of years past. This year's Bengals have the league's best turnover ratio (+20) and their offense ranks 5<sup>th</sup> overall, but they have a lot to prove after the way they rolled over and died when they hosted the Steelers back in Week 7. Pittsburgh dominated the time of possession battle by rushing 47 times for 221 yards, and they foiled Carson Palmer's attempts to save the game by intercepting him twice. Since the Colts have won as much with defense and their running game this season as they have with their explosive passing game there are many who expect them to dominate the Bengals the same way the Steelers did, but I don't see it that way. The Steelers visited Cincinnati at a time when the Bengals had just played two consecutive road games and were more than a little intoxicated by their early 5-1 record. Now they've been humbled and they've had a bye week to rest up and prepare for the best team in the NFL, so I expect the Bengals to put up a spirited fight in what I believe will be a physical, high-scoring game. *I still think the **Colts** will win because of their ability to win defensive battles as well as shootouts, but don't expect a blowout.*

### Tampa Bay Buccaneers (6-3) @ Atlanta Falcons (6-3)

Just one week after Kansas City head coach Dick Vermeil secured victory for his team by calling for a last second touchdown rather than the game-tying field goal, Tampa Bay head coach Jon Gruden followed in his footsteps by sending Mike Alstott in from one yard out for the game-winning two point conversion. The victory ended a two game losing streak that had many questioning whether the Buccaneers would be able to compete with Chris Simms at quarterback. Simms's performance against the Redskins (15 of 29 for 279 yards, three touchdowns and zero interceptions) was a welcomed improvement over his previous two starts in which he threw four interceptions and just two touchdown passes. The question remains, however, if he can perform at that level on the road. The Falcons play in a dome, so Simms will have a hard time hearing himself think on Sunday. Gruden will ask him to play within the system, avoid turnovers and let the defense keep Tampa Bay in the game.

Michael Vick is 2-3 against the Buccaneers so far in his career, and he'll be extra motivated to perform at a high level after fumbling three times in last week's loss to the Packers. Only one of those fumbles resulted in a turnover, but it's still troubling that Vick is coughing up the ball at all. I don't think he has butterfingers because he's just dying to run, and I don't think it's the fault of the offensive line. In my opinion, it has more to do with Vick trying to keep a play alive long enough for his receivers to get open. If

he had a big play target at wide receiver – someone like Randy Moss or Terrell Owens – he would probably have more confidence to get rid of the ball sooner. Right now he's hesitant to throw into coverage because his receivers keep dropping passes or bobbling them right into the hands of defenders. The good news for the Falcons is that their injury list is short, and they still have a full roster of fast, physical, talented players who are upset about losing at home to an inferior team. *That's why this week Vick will protect the ball better, Warrick Dunn and T.J. Duckett will run relentlessly, and Demorrio Williams and the **Falcons'** defense will remind Simms that the learning curve for quarterbacks in the NFL is steep.*

#### Oakland Raiders (3-6) @ Washington Redskins (5-4)

I got an e-mail from reader Gabe Ramirez this week. He wanted to know if he should take the Raiders over the Redskins in his "Survivor" office pool this week. Having been eliminated from said pool early in the season I am not necessarily in a position to offer advice, but that didn't stop me from assuring Gabe that it would be foolish to pick Oakland on the road against a good team that's back home after losing a heart-breaker on the road. The Raiders may be able to score a lot of points, but they haven't proven an ability to stop many offenses from scoring. In fact, they've only prevented the opposition from scoring 20 points twice this season. Washington has a proud defense, embarrassed after allowing a Chris Simms led offense to score 36 points, and an explosive offense that scored 35 points against the league's second ranked defense. *Expect the **Redskins** to take out some frustrations and beat the Raiders.*

#### Carolina Panthers (7-2) @ Chicago Bears (6-3)

The return of running back Thomas Jones will certainly help the Bears look better than they did in last week's wind-blown win over the 49ers, but do the Bears really have what it takes to beat the NFC's new best team? The philosophy that's sustained Chicago's five game winning streak has been "defense first, running second, pass if necessary," and it's worked quite well against the likes of Minnesota, Baltimore, Detroit, New Orleans and San Francisco. Now the Carolina Panthers have blown into the Windy City looking to extend an NFC-best six game winning streak that has also been padded with wins over lesser opponents, but they have the confidence that comes with a Super Bowl tested quarterback and victories over the Patriots and Buccaneers this season. *The Bears will give it their all, but ultimately they won't have enough to send the **Panthers** home with their tail between their legs.*

#### Minnesota Vikings (4-5) @ Green Bay Packers (2-7)

Monday, November 21, 2005 @ 9:00 PM ET on ABC

This divisional showdown is Minnesota's chance to save what has already been a rocky season (to say the least). If the Bears lose to the Panthers the Vikings have a realistic chance to win the NFC North title. How so? They'll be 3-1 in the division and just one game behind the Bears who end their season with a visit to Minnesota. First things first. Lambeau Field was the site of a wild card playoff game last January which the Vikings won convincingly. How did they do it? Daunte Culpepper threw four touchdown passes, including two to Randy Moss and one to Moe Williams, while Brett Favre threw four interceptions.

The good news for the Packers is that Culpepper is out for the season due to injury, Williams has missed the last two games because of chronic back problems, and Randy Moss now plays for the Raiders. The bad news is that Brett Favre has thrown seven interceptions in his last three games and their only running back (Ahman Green and Najeh Davenport both suffered season-ending injuries) is a rookie from Liberty College named Samkon Gado who's played in three NFL games, averages 3.3 yards per carry and has fumbled twice. If the Packers hope to win they'll have to play the way they did in Atlanta last weekend. That means multiple defenders must tackle every Viking who touches the ball, and it means that Brett Favre has to avoid throwing interceptions. *I can't picture the Vikings benefiting from five turnovers and two kicks returned for touchdowns in back-to-back weeks, so I'll say cheese and pick the **Packers**.*

#### Up The Gut

- Arizona (2-7) @ St. Louis (4-5): The playoffs are now and every Sunday for the **Rams** who are fighting for a wild card playoff berth now that the Seahawks have a stranglehold on the NFC West.
- Detroit (4-5) @ Dallas (6-3): Joey Harrington showed flashes of brilliance last week thanks to the return of Charles Rogers, but he'll be back to his interception-prone ways against the **Cowboys'** D.
- Jacksonville (6-3) @ Tennessee (2-7): Their offense finally came alive last week against the Jets, and the **Jaguars** should be even more confident after hanging another 30+ on the Titans in Nashville.
- Miami (3-6) @ Cleveland (3-6): I really want to pick the Dolphins, but I saw something in Ruben Droughns last Sunday night that I really liked so I'll pick the **Browns** to pull one out at home.

- New Orleans (2-7) @ New England (5-4): That injury list is just as daunting as it was last week, but the **Patriots** won in Miami so why shouldn't they beat the Saints at home? Bye week? Not enough.
- Philadelphia (4-5) @ NY Giants (6-3): McNabb is gone – maybe for the season, and the **Giants** are focused on righting the ship after being pillaged by the Vikings last week. Order will be restored.
- Pittsburgh (7-2) @ Baltimore (2-7): Big Ben busted. Batch patched. Maddox? Randle El if he falters. Ravens should win then, right? Nope. **Steelers** will ride The Bus and “Fast” Willie Parker to W land.
- Seattle (7-2) @ San Francisco (2-7): Dorsey's in for the 49ers, but he's a sitting duck behind that line. The 49ers will get blown out by the **Seahawks**, and there's nothing Bryant Young can do about it.
- Buffalo (4-5) @ San Diego (5-4): The Bills have a decent team, but the **Chargers** are rested up after their bye week and are ready for a late season streak that will get them into the playoffs. Watch out!
- NY Jets (2-7) @ Denver (7-2): **Broncos** by infinity. Honestly, if the Jets win I'll be dumfounded.
- Kansas City (5-4) @ Houston (1-8): The absence of tackle Willie Roaf was enough to cripple KC's running game and leave Trent Green exposed last week. The **Texans** will get running back Domanick Davis back this week, so I'm gambling a pick on the home team. Am I nuts? Let's find out. Play ball!

### Statistics

- I went 4-1 in my featured games last week with an overall record of 9-5. My season record now stands at 90-54 (62.50%), and my all-time record is 381-223 (63.08%).
- UFR Formula: 10-4; Dr. Z's Power Rankings on SI.com: 10-4; ESPN.com Power Rankings: 10-4
- Last week's locks were Denver (-3), Carolina (-9) and Atlanta (-9).
- “Lock of the Week” Update: 2-1 last week (66-63-3 all-time). The Broncos and Panthers kindly routed their opposition, but the Falcons fumbled six times in their embarrassing home loss to the Packers.

### Week 11 Locks

Denver (-13)  
Seattle (-13)  
St. Louis (-9.5)

### Keys

Line should be Broncos -21, so this pick is easy.  
49ers had a defense once upon a time but this is not that time.  
*Greatest Show on Turf* returns for a one-day engagement.

### Standings

#### AFC East

New England (5-4)  
Buffalo (4-5)  
Miami (3-6)  
N.Y. Jets (2-7)

#### AFC North

Cincinnati (7-2)  
Pittsburgh (7-2)  
Cleveland (3-6)  
Baltimore (2-7)

#### AFC South

Indianapolis (9-0)  
Jacksonville (6-3)  
Tennessee (2-7)  
Houston (1-8)

#### AFC West

Denver (7-2)  
Kansas City (5-4)  
San Diego (5-4)  
Oakland (3-6)

#### NFC East

Dallas (6-3)  
NY Giants (6-3)  
Washington (5-4)  
Philadelphia (4-5)

#### NFC North

Chicago (6-3)  
Detroit (4-5)  
Minnesota (4-5)  
Green Bay (2-7)

#### NFC South

Carolina (7-2)  
Atlanta (6-3)  
Tampa Bay (6-3)  
New Orleans (2-7)

#### NFC West

Seattle (7-2)  
St. Louis (4-5)  
Arizona (2-7)  
San Francisco (2-7)