

DIVISIONAL PLAYOFFS

2014 TRASH TALK

Before we get to the news and notes for the Divisional Playoffs round in the NFL, lets take a quick look at two great NCAA games last night. Unfortunately, I missed both as I was at a wedding at the Desert Botanical Garden where they had the most incredible Chihuly glass display (click on the 2013 photo link). Very cool, especially lit at night.

But, while I was away, the Clemson Tigers dealt the BIG another blow by handily taking out Ohio State in the Orange Bowl. I saw a replay later, and it was a good game until late when the mistakes by OSU and the talent and speed of Clemson took over. Sammy Watkins is unreal, he's going to be a star in the pros. In the Cotton Bowl, again another close game, but Missouri just had too much for Oklahoma State. For all the talk of ex=Big 12 teams Missouri and Texas A & M not belonging in the SEC, they seem to have done rather well so far. As a last thought, just like to note that vaunted geniuses Nick Saban and Urban Meyer were a combined 0-4 to close out the season.

In the pros, my first comment is on the somewhat startling difficulty of the NFL in selling out three of the four games this weekend, which could have meant local blackouts for home team fans. Bolts/Bengals in Cinci, Niners/Packers at Lambeau and Chiefs/Colts in Indy all struggled to sell out and needed corporate help swooping in to buy up the last blocks to get the required sellout. Maybe, maybe, you can see that at the other two, but the thought of a non-sellout at Lambeau in Titledown? Sacrilege. Our friend Peterr from FDL wrote in with some thoughts:

Reading some of the news stories about this over breakfast, various folks point to the cost of tickets and the prevalence of 55 inch flat screens at home as reasons for people not going.

This strikes me as yet another symptom of the two-tier economic world we're in these days. For all the 1%ers who have enjoyed the rise in the stock market and have plenty of money to throw around, there are still a lot of lunchpail fans for whom \$100+ for the cheapest ticket is still too much, and a lot of other fans who used to carry lunchbuckets whom no job means no tickets either. The NFL is increasingly becoming a rich fan's sport – PSLs, high ticket prices, higher parking/amenities fees, more games leaving broadcast TV for ESPN on basic cable or the pricier NFL Red Zone cable channel, over-the-top merchandise prices, etc.

Even if all three of these games do get sold out at the last minute, it's a sign of real problems in the economy generally and the NFL specifically when selling out playoff games goes down to the last minute.

I think that may be right. Not to mention that the Niners and Cheese tilt in the late Sunday game in Green Bay could be the coldest NFL game ever played:

Temperatures at Lambeau Field are expected to be a frigid minus 2 degrees when the Packers and San Francisco 49ers kickoff, and by the fourth quarter it'll be a bone-chilling minus 7, with wind chills approaching minus 30, according to the National Weather Service. Officials are warning fans to take extra safety measures to stay warm including dressing in layers and sipping warm drinks.

Holy crap, that's cold! You know where else it's going to be cold? Philly, that's where. But Philly had none of the issues of Cinci, Green Bay, or even the temperature controlled dome in

Indy. Say what you will about the Philly fans, but they are solid and they show up. Gotta love em.

First game up is the early Saturday game, Chefs at Colts, on NBC. As previously mentioned, there are no weather issues in the dome. We have a bit of a yardstick on this game as these two teams met in Week 16 at Arrowhead. Where the Colts simply cooked the Chefs by a score of 23-7. Also, while Indy finished the regular season on a clear upswing, with Andrew Luck starting to mesh with a young receiving corps missing Reggie Wayne, KC limped to the finish line, losing four of their last seven. More importantly, while the Colts had huge wins over top shelf teams like San Francisco, Seattle, Denver and, as aforementioned, Kansas City. Both QBs are very solid. Luck has maturity beyond his years and, maybe, bigger play capability (though Alex Smith really started to find some of that in the second half of the year). The Colts are on a roll, are at home, and are a slight favorite in Vegas (-1). But the game is too close to call for me; if forced, I might slightly lean to KC for the upset behind Jamaal Charles rushing through a susceptible Colts front defense.

Second up is the Saints in Philly. There has been a lot of chatter on ESPN and fox, etc about the effect of bitter cold weather on indoor oriented quarterbacks, namely Peyton, who has the week off, and Drew Breeeeze. New Orleans is a shaky road team, and the Iggles have been a shaky home team. Go figure. Frankly, I give little to no credence to Brees having problems throwing the ball; he is still Drew Breeeeze after all, and the Eagles' secondary is average at best. But Nick Foles is a great kid, and a good arm. I think most of the rookie element is gone from Foles now, and he has LeShean McCoy to tote the rock in the inclement weather, which he has shown himself very adept at. Good game, but I am taking the Eagles.

Early game Sunday is Bolts at Bengals. Cincinnati is a seven point favorite on the

current line. San diego backed into the playoffs with an overtime win over the Chiefs that arguably never should have happened but for the Chefs resting half their team and some (yet again) lousy officiating. Still, the Bolts won 5 of their last six down the stretch to make it and seem to be on a bit of a roll behind an improved defense. But the Bengals have a superb and consistent defense with playmakers front and back. If Andy Dalton simply doesn't make mistakes, Cincinnati, who is unbeaten at home this year, should be able to beat the Bolts in the cold.

Last game is the best. Niners. Packers. Hard Frozen Tundra. Man, this is real, good old fashioned, slobberknocker stuff. It is improbable that the Packers are even in this game, other than the fact that no one else wanted to win the NFC-Norske. But here they are in all their 8-7-1 glory, revitalized by the return of Aaron Rodgers. Even counting Brady, Rodgers may well be the most important player to his team in the league. Also, the Pack has Randall Cobb back, and that is absolutely huge (though not of the magnitude of Rodgers, of course). Throw in the hard nosed running of Eddie Lacy, and the Cheese are feeling good about their prospects at home in the cold and on the Tundra.

But San Francisco has their own weapons on offense with Frank Gore, Anquan Boldin, Vernon Davis, and, of course, Kaepernick. It is not just offenses that will have to take the field and perform in the inclement conditions, however, so too will the defenses. And on that count, especially with Clay Matthews out for the Pack, the Niners are WAY ahead. So, the odds ought be with the Niners, and Vegas says they are, posting them as a three point favorite. But, if Kaepernick cannot match Rodgers in the frigid passing game, and Green Bay can thus focus on limiting Frank Gore, they will get the win. I am going way out on a non-frozen rope and predicting the Cheese pull it off. Their once vaunted invulnerability at Lambeau in the

playoffs is gone, but I think they pull one out for the ages.

As a last tip, I suggest following my friend Erin Faulk on Twitter. Erin is @erinscafe and she is simply great. She is also, by happenstance, on her way to Green Bay to see the game. She is a HUGE Aaron Rodgers fan (even currently going by the name "Erin Rodgers". Erin is also the director/co-producer of a movie about Twitter called "#FF the Film". You may remember the stories of Cory Booker knowing an exotic dancer, @LynsieLee, from a movie they were both in. It caused quite a stir for a while. That movie would be FF the Film, Erin's flick. She is hilarious, check her out.