

# THE CONFERENCE CHAMPIONSHIPS TRASH TALK

Sadly, this is our penultimate weekend of football here at the Wheelhouse. Down to two games, San Francisco versus Seattle and New England versus Denver. And, really, it is fitting, as these were probably the two best teams in their respective conferences when the season started, were throughout, and are now. So, we are where we are supposed to be.

**Patriots at Broncos:** While the NFC Championship features two new school mobile kids on the block, the AFC features two of the classic, and classiest, traditional pocket passers in NFL history. Any discussion of best ever quarterbacks has Peyton Manning and Tom Brady in it, irrespective of who you put at the top of the list. Personally, I have Joe Montana still at the top and think some older players, to wit Otto Graham and Bart Starr, are given far too short a shrift. But Brady and Manning have earned their spot in the discussion, and this is a real treat to be able to see them face off, yet again, in such an important playoff game.

The Patriots seem to have stabilized on defense, the Broncos seem to still be reeling from the loss of Von Miller. On paper, Denver has a significantly better defense, both against the pass and the rush. But paper doesn't count for this game, and I think it is a draw on the D side of the ball. On the offensive side, both teams have been known to rely on their quarterbacks too much. But both have recently found, and relied on, their running game. LeGarrette Blount was a monster for the Pats last week, and Knowshon Moreno ate the Pats up earlier this year. You already know about the QB's; they are a wash. There is one area where there is a difference though. Receivers. Bill Bel and Brady have been geniuses with what they have gotten out of rooks and scrubs, but Denver

has serious ballers in Welker, Eric Decker, Demaryius Thomas and Julius Thomas. That is a real edge. Then give the coaching edge to Bill Bel...and you end up with a pick em.

**49ers at Seahawks:** They may be newfangled, but both QB's in the NFC Championship are superb, and, apparently, evenly matched too. But not so fast. Kaepernick has been rediscovering his groove down the stretch, and Russell Wilson has been looking a little shaky in the confidence (and performance) category. Edge to Kap. Niners also have far better receivers, with Anquan Boldin, Vernon Davis and Crabtree, than do the Squawks. Percy Harvin would have helped level that playing field, but he won't be playing. Gore and Lynch are both studs, and thus a wash, but the QB and receivers are a huge plus for SF.

The defensive paper actually seems to favor the Niners but, again, toss the paper out the window. Seattle's defense is bad ass, and they will have the 12th Man noise that comes with their home field. That is an edge. Coaching is a wash between Harbaugh and Carroll, but man do they completely dislike each other. The game is really probably another pick em, to slight favorite for the Niners; however, I am going to take a flyer on the Squawks. I don't feel good about it, but there you have it.

**Penalty Flag Department:** Yeah, the hanky has to be thrown on Peyton Manning. Really? Bud Light? Get the fuck out! And, big ups to the Colorado craft brewers for calling him out on it.

Music is by by It's A Beautiful Day, featuring Pattie Santos and David LaFlamme. A completely killer band out of the 60's heyday of San Francisco. Shame they never hit it bigger and are mostly forgotten now, because they were really good. And to tie it all together, this song, White Bird, is a song about some melancholy times LaFlamme and his wife spent in Seattle. See, it all ties together for the NFC Championship Game!