

THE FINAL COUNTDOWN: CHAMPIONSHIP SUNDAY NFL TRASH TALK

Yep, that's right folks, it's the Final Countdown. No, I am not talking about the sudden exit of the narcissistic scold Keith Olbermann from MSNBC, the news will go on just fine without him, and MSNBC will undoubtedly continue to funnel an endless supply of slime through our teevee sets. No, I'm talking about the battle for berths in the SuperBowl. And a couple of really great matchups are on tap. Packers/Bears and Steelers/Jets. There is no way to say any of the four are here by fluke, they earned it and deserve to be playing on Championship Sunday.

First up is the Black and Blue Division throwback grudge match between the Green Bay Packers and Chicago Bears. Tometown versus the Monsters of the Midway. Hey, this just reeks of football the way it was designed and meant to be played. The ghosts of the gridiron will come for this one. Halas, Lambeau, Lombardi, Butkus, Sayers, Starr, Nitschke, the list is endless. At 181 games, it is the longest and most storied rivalry in the history of pro football, with 21 NFL Championships between the two (Green Bay 12, Chicago 9) and four SuperBowl crowns (GB 3, Bears 1). Even better, the game won't be played in any pansy assed dome. Nope, real dirt, sod and grass with heap load of wind and cold. Gonna be a scorcher, with the temperature expected to spike at 20 degrees, wind chill down to 10 with wind off Lake Michigan and possible lake effect snow. Booyah. Perfect.

We saw a preview of the conference championship between these two in the last week of the regular season, with the Pack eeking out a hard fought 10-3 win that they had to have to get in the playoffs at all. But Aaron Rodgers, Clay Matthews and friends have been on a serious roll

since then, with convincing wins over Philadelphia and Atlanta. Oh yeah, and it is not just Charles Woodson any more, Tramon Williams has risen from undrafted obscurity to be a big game difference maker. The Bears come in as the number two seed, but are a little harder to gauge as they had bye and an absolute blowout of Seattle last week. But I have to admit, the Bears are better than I gave them credit for. Their defense is once again tough and aggressive, Urlacher is healthy and playing with abandon and Jay Cutler has seemingly matured into a consistent quality pro quarterback. Despite being at home on Soldier Field, I think the two defenses cancel each other out and it comes down to leadership on offense. On that front, I will take Aaron Rodgers and the Pack for the win.

The nightcap features the Jets and Steelers in the Big Ketchup Bottle. Another game in the elements and on natural ground. From PFT:

In Pittsburgh, weather forecasters are predicting single digit temperatures on Sunday evening when the Steelers and Jets face off at Heinz Field. That could mark the coldest playoff game in team history; the temperature dropped to nine degrees in 2005 when the Patriots beat the Steelers.

Awesome. That's only about 65 degrees less than where my seats for the game are located. The Jets are somewhat remarkably in the conference championship game for the second year in a row and in both years of the still nascent career of Mark Sanchez. You have to give the kid some credit, and a heavy helping to Rex Ryan too, he has really coached them up. They have an attitude and win, lose or draw, that is their character and they roll with it. The brash Jets are the buzz in the air, but the team on the other side of the ball just shows up and does what they always do. Bring their lunchbucket and get physical. Big Ben isn't exactly Joe Montana stylish, but he is a load, is tough as nails,

doesn't quit and has a proven knack for the moment and big games. Rex Ryan isn't the only guy who can coach up a defense, Dick Lebeau has been wreaking defensive havoc in the NFL since well before Ryan was born, and he clearly is not done yet. The Jets have the buzz, but the Stillers have the goods. And Troy Polamalu, Big Ben and Hines Ward. That's a winning formula.

Get the beer, heat up some hot toddy, ready the chips and dip, cause whoa nelly we got a couple of real barnburners today. Here is a little pep talk for the occasion. Let's get it on! Oh yeah, and to Mr. Olbermann, don't let the door hit you where your head is on the way out.

[Editors Note: I sincerely apologize for the link in the first paragraph to The Final Countdown, now that nasty bit of big hair 80's trash earwig music is going to be rattling around your brain, killing perfectly good gray matter, like it has been mine ever since yesterday.]