

Monday Morning Analysis – BY MATTHEW HATFIELD
NFL – Monday, October 1, 2007

October is here. The final Sunday in September saw Oakland, Detroit, Cleveland and Tampa Bay all earn victories. What do those four teams have in common? They were the first four teams on the clock in last April's NFL Draft. As of now, those four have a cumulative record of 10-6 – none with a losing mark entering October. Meanwhile, San Diego and Chicago – the two clubs with the best record in the AFC and NFC respectively during the 2006-07 campaign – each enters Week 5 at 1-3 overall. It just goes to show you how quickly things can change in the National Football League.....

Absolutely Favre-lous:

“You look marvelous... simply marvelous... absolutely MARVELOUS!” You all remember the Billy Crystal's Fernando act, right? Well, some of you do. Anyhow, Brett Favre is playing marvelous. On Sunday afternoon, Favre was on the top of his game yet again as Green Bay improved to 4-0 overall and he set some more records in what is shaping up to be a season to remember for the Pack.

Brett Favre moved into first all-time on the career touchdown pass list, passing Dan Marino on his record setting 421st TD. Marino, who wore jersey number 13, held the record for 13 years. On the receiving end of the record setting pass was second-year receiver Greg Jennings. It came in the first half on a third down play with the game scoreless. Favre audibled for a drag slant and it worked to perfection. Also, Favre set the career pass attempts record in this game. Interestingly enough, on a day where Favre threw for 344 yards, two touchdowns and no interceptions, he was able to spread the ball around to ten different players. He wasn't locked on one receiver and that's the way the enthusiastic Favre has been throughout his career. The past few years Green Bay was getting bad breaks in games, whether Favre played well or not. Now their fortunes are beginning to change, never more evident than on one play. On a fake punt, Jon Ryan was able to avoid a change of possession and momentum change in favor of the Vikings and get seven yards for a key first down. That play – along with the solid defense and renewed greatness of #4 – have Green Bay thinking they will make a playoff run.

On the Minnesota side of things, they made a nice comeback attempt late when Packers defensive back Atari Bigby intercepted a deflected pass to end the Vikings' rally. Their biggest problem is they don't have another playmaker to go with rookie running back Adrian Peterson, who rushed for 108 yards on ten carries in the first half alone on a tough and much improved Green Bay defense (4 sacks and a fumble recovery by Johnny Jolly). In fact, Peterson came in accounting for exactly 50% of his team's offense.

Using Both Warner & Leinart, Cards Knock Off Steelers:

Who says a two-quarterback system can't work in the NFL? Arizona Cardinals Head Coach Ken Whisenhunt is doing it and it appears to be working as Kurt Warner and Matt Leinart shared snaps at QB as the Cards were able to knock the Pittsburgh Steelers from the ranks of the unbeaten in a 21-14 win. Whisenhunt, a former offensive coordinator of the Steelers, decide to use Warner in their no-package huddle last week in a comeback attempt at Baltimore, and the former Super Bowl MVP and two-time regular season MVP was extremely effective. In that game Warner completed 15-of-20 passes for 258 yards, two touchdowns and no interceptions while Leinart struggled, completing just 9-for-20 with 53 yards. Though okay in the early going as the starter, Leinart was unable to get Arizona in a position to score as they punted on each of their first three possessions.

Trailing 7-0 to the Steelers, Whisenhunt, who came to the desert after he and line coach Russ Grimm (also with Arizona) were passed over for the Steelers' Head Coaching position that Mike Tomlin would end up receiving, turned to the grizzled veteran. Warner finished with yet another solid outing, completing 14-of-21 passes for 132 yards, a touchdown to Jerheme Urban that tied the game and no interceptions. Helping matters was the fact that Steelers safety Tory Polamalu, who recovered a Larry Fitzgerald fumble on Warner's first completion, left with an abdominal injury. That aside, Leinart got another chance after his 4-for-10 start. Steve Breaston returned a punt for a touchdown, the Cardinals' first since 1993, giving them a 14-7 lead. Leinart then returned, and surprising the Steelers' defense, he completed a 38-yard bomb to Fitzgerald to get them in position where Edgerrin James could punch it in for a touchdown. Also helping in this game was the performance of Arizona's defense, which shut down Willie Parker for a mere 37 yards rushing on 19 carries. In his previous three games, Parker rushed for 100 yards each time out. Adrian Wilson intercepted a Ben Roethlisberger pass in the end zone.

Leinart in some ways is at the crossroads that Warner was last year, only younger with plenty more football to play. The 36-year-old Warner pondered retirement last season when he had a costly fumble in a loss to St. Louis, whom they'll face this coming weekend on the road, and eventually relinquished the starting job to the ex-Heisman Trophy winner at USC that was selected 10th overall in the 2006 NFL Draft. Now, although in a part-time role, Warner has re-vitalized his career, showing he still has some 'game' left in him, something to prove... that this old guy isn't washed up. Not everyone is happy, though.

"I just want them to ride or die with me," expressed a dissatisfied Leinart afterwards. "If I'm the franchise quarterback, play me and let me stumble, because I'll fight through it, and that will help me and our team in the long run. I know coaches want to win now, and I guess they have their records. But I don't understand it; this switching back and forth is almost worse than getting benched. I don't really know what the motive is, and it's tough rotating. But I'll just keep working hard and try to do my part."

Despite Switch To Griese, Bears Get Beat Again:

Scoring an uncanny NFL-record 34 points in the fourth quarter without wide receiver and second overall draft pick Calvin Johnson, the Detroit Lions edged the Chicago Bears in an NFC North battle, 37-27. The win moved the Lions to 3-1, while the Bears fell to 1-3, in spite of their switch at quarterback that put Rex Grossman on the bench and made Brian Griese as the starter. At times, Griese was effective, completing short passes and moving them down the field. Other times he was not, finishing with three interceptions. Until the Bears can get better play out of the quarterback position {*could Kyle Orton be next in line?*}, they aren't going to be a contender to get back to the Super Bowl. More than anything else in this game though, their defense let them down. Not only were the Lions without Johnson, but their running game isn't that solid. Tatum Bell fumbled inside the Bears' ten-yard line in the first half, which was a bad break for Detroit. Fumbling was an issue for Bell coming out of Oklahoma State.

Speaking of fumbles, excellent Bears return man Devin Hester, who had a return for a touchdown in the second half that helped give Chicago the lead, fumbled in the first half. Robbie Gould also had a 52-yard field goal blocked. Chicago continues to struggle on the ground as Cedric Benson still can't get out of his own way, and for Detroit d-tackle Shaun Rogers played very well, proving he's a force vs. the run. Jon Kitna spoke big about what he thought the Lions were capable of doing this year and so far he's backing up his talk. Kitna's 1227 passing yards lead the entire NFL. Casey Fitzsimmons' kickoff return for a touchdown late iced the Lions' third win of this season. As strange as it may sound, the Lions are looking like they'll be a factor in the NFC playoffs.

Buffalo 17, NY Jets 14: In his first career start, Buffalo Bills rookie quarterback Trent Edwards got the job done, completing 22 of 28 pass attempts for 234 yards and a key second half touchdown pass to tight end Michael Gaines as Dick Jauron and company won their first game of the season. This game was scoreless at the half and Buffalo was first to get on the scoreboard when rookie tailback Marshawn Lynch ran in a touchdown. On 4th & 1 inside Bills territory, Jets Head Coach Eric Mangini made the peculiar decision to punt. Chad Pennington's velocity clearly wasn't there on his throws, and even worse, the running game was non-existent with Thomas Jones gaining only 35 yards on 12 rushes. New York doesn't have a big-play offense right now and that's hurting them in tight games, especially when they are committing too many penalties (9 for 65) and fail to get consistent pressure on the other team's quarterback. They came in with one sack in three games, and although Victor Hobson had a sack and fumble recovery early, the plays made by the Jets' defensive front were few and far between.

Cleveland 27, Baltimore 13: Although considered the top defense in the league, the Baltimore Ravens have struggled defensively the past few weeks. Ray Lewis, Ed Reed and company saw Arizona rally behind Kurt Warner in the second half last week before holding off a rally; needed Lewis to intercept a Kellen Clemens pass in the end zone to prevent the Jets from tying the game up; and yesterday got torched for 24 first half points by a Browns offense that looked pedestrian when the season started as Pittsburgh walloped them 34-7. Up front in the trenches, Cleveland clearly won the battle as their

interior offensive linemen – Eric Steinbach and center Hank Fraley in particular – did a superb job of blocking for Jamal Lewis running the football as well as giving quarterback Derek Anderson time to deliver throws. Anderson launched a 78-yard touchdown pass to Braylon Edwards in the early going and from there the Browns played from ahead throughout the entire afternoon. What also plagued the Ravens was yet another special teams penalty, their ninth of the season. It gave Cleveland a fresh set of downs to erase a missed field goal and Cleveland went on to take a 21-point lead into the break. Ravens QB Steve McNair attempted a career-high 53 passes, which is definitely not a recipe for success for Baltimore.

Dallas 35, St. Louis 7: Led by the sterling play of Tony Romo and an offense that is routinely putting up 30 points, the Dallas Cowboys moved their record to 4-0. They are now one of only two teams in the NFC {the Green Bay Packers being the other} with an unblemished record. O.J. Atogwe intercepted a Romo pass and returned it to the Dallas 25-yard line to end a scoreless first quarter. But Jeff Wilkins, who missed two field goals last week, pushed a 28-yard field goal too far to the right. St. Louis' only score of the day came when Dante Hall returned a punt 85 yards for a touchdown. It was Hall's sixth career punt return touchdown, which ranks most among all active players. Romo's best play of the day came when he had a snap go over his head in the second quarter. After tracking the ball down, Romo picked it up and ran 37 yards for an improbable first down. It helped get them the lead as they ended that possession with a touchdown. Playing for the injured Terry Glenn, Patrick Crayton gave them a boost with seven catches for 184 yards and two scores. St. Louis, suffering through a ton of injuries, has now gone 30 straight drives without scoring an offensive touchdown. Defensively, they aren't any better with only one interception on the season and just one sack yesterday. The Rams are battered, bruised and in jeopardy of having one of the worst records in the NFL. Also in trouble is Head Coach Scott Linehan, who could be out in just two seasons if things don't start to improve. They need a better showing when Arizona visits on Sunday.

Atlanta 26, Houston 16: Against the team that traded him away, Texans quarterback Matt Schaub was unable to get a victory over the Atlanta Falcons, despite a statline that included 317 yards passing, a touchdown and no interceptions – all without stud receiving target Andre Johnson. That's because Joey Harrington's statline was even better as he surprisingly completed 23-of-29 passes for 223 yards, two scores and no interceptions. Recently, the Falcons signed Byron Leftwich and ever since then Harrington has answered the bell. Wideouts Michael Jenkins and Roddy White, who both have been the subject of criticism in the past as well, each had 64 yards receiving with Jenkins catching Harrington's two touchdown tosses. To me, the difference in this game was the Atlanta defense; they held Houston to only six points in the second half as linebackers Keith Brooking and Michael Boley made plays (14 solo stops combined) to lead that group.

Oakland 35, Miami 17: Lightning delayed the start of this game, but once they got on the field, Daunte Culpepper was seeking revenge against his former team and came out on top when it was all said and done. Culpepper produced five touchdowns on the

day, rushing for three and passing for two more – both on completions to wideout Jerry Porter. Oakland led 14-7 at the break and went on to pound an aging, fatigued Dolphins defense in the second half. LaMont Jordan suffered an injury in this game after carrying the rock 15 times for 74 yards. Justin Fargas came on in relief, providing plenty of highlight reel runs, finishing with a day-best 179 rushing yards. In short, Miami couldn't stop the run to save its life as the Raiders grabbed their seventh win in a row over the Dolphins. As far as the offense went for the Dolphins, receiver and the team's top target – Chris Chambers – had only one reception for eight yards in the first half. Trent Green wasn't any better through two quarters, completing six of ten passes for 69 yards and getting picked off twice, once by second-year player Thomas Howard. Believe it or not, the Raiders are in a three-way tie for first place in the wild and wacky AFC West.

Seattle 23, San Francisco 3: With first place in the NFC West on the line, the Seattle Seahawks rose to the occasion and avenged two losses to the San Francisco 49ers from last year. Seattle defensive lineman Rocky Bernard sacked Niners quarterback Alex Smith early in the game, hitting him so hard that Smith suffered a shoulder injury. That forced Head Coach Mike Nolan to insert vet Trent Dilfer into the lineup. At this point in his career, Dilfer is more of a mentor than a player {note - and analyst work may be in Dilfer's near future too}.

Indianapolis 38, Denver 20: No real surprise here. The defending Super Bowl Champions took care of business as usual at home, erasing an early 10-0 deficit to the Denver Broncos to prevail and run their record to 4-0. Denver did its best to keep Peyton Manning and the Indianapolis offense off the field. It worked for the most part in the first half. Mike Shanahan's team gashed a suspect, questionable Colts run defense for about thirty minutes. In fact, with 2:19 left in the opening quarter, Travis Henry already had nine carries for 67 yards and Selvin Young added 47 yards rushing on three touches. Henry finished with 131 yards on 26 carries while Young had 86 yards. In the end, it was too much Manning and too much Joseph Addai. Manning threw three touchdown passes and Addai churned out 136 yards on the ground on 19 carries.

Kansas City 30, San Diego 16: Can you believe the San Diego Chargers have fallen to 1-3? I can't. Early on, it looked like the San Diego of old as they jumped out to a 16-6 lead at the half and were up 10-0 after one quarter of play. On defense, Shaun Phillips and Shawne Merriman were ripping through the offensive line of Kansas City. Nicknamed 'The Matrix,' Phillips recorded his third sack of the year. Offensively, reigning league MVP LaDainian Tomlinson was finally playing like the player we saw last year as he had ten rushes for 59 yards and a touchdown. Through one quarter, Chiefs running back Larry Johnson had only two carries for six yards. The second half was a totally different story as Kansas City scored 24 unanswered points, including touchdown passes to tight end Tony Gonzalez and rookie wide receiver Dwayne Bowe. Gonzalez tied Shannon Sharpe's record for most scores by a tight end (62TD's) and knotted the game up at 13-apiece. Bowe's touchdown measured 51 yards. San Diego didn't get a good game from quarterback Philip Rivers, and defensively, they must've been

disappointed with their play in the second half against a Kansas City team that scored only 26 points in three games.

Tampa Bay 20, Carolina 7: Without injured starting quarterback Jake Delhomme, the Carolina Panthers turned to David Carr and it didn't work out as they were beaten soundly by an improved Tampa Bay team. Carr, formerly of the Houston Texans, who Carolina lost to just two weeks ago, concluded the day a horrific 19-for-41 with 155 yards passing, one touchdown and an interception. In addition, Carr was sacked three times. If not for a late touchdown by second-year running back DeAngelo Williams, the Panthers would've been shutout at home. Jeff Garcia continued to manage the game nicely for Jon Gruden and the Buccaneers. Stepping up was a crafty veteran by the name of Ike Hilliard. Once a member of the New York Giants' team that lost to Baltimore in the Super Bowl, Hilliard already had seven catches for 114 yards with more than seven minutes to go in the second quarter. While younger receivers Michael Clayton and Maurice Stovall haven't delivered, Hilliard was able to on Sunday. The biggest key for the Bucs' success so far? Their offensive line, which surprisingly continues to play well. We know the defense still has some good players on it with Derrick Brooks, Ronde Barber and the youngsters are starting to round into shape, notably Barrett Ruud – the league's leading tackler with 29 tackles. However, not all was good for Tampa Bay in this game as they lost both running back Cadillac Williams and left tackle Luke Petitgout for the season due to injury.

NY Giants 16, Philadelphia 3: Anchored by a dominating performance from their previously maligned defense, the New York Giants were able to even their overall record to 2-2 while dropping the Philadelphia Eagles to 1-3. A usually strong Eagles o-line got eaten up by the G-men's defensive front, particularly left tackle Winston Justice. Clearly, Philly missed Brian Westbrook, L.J. Smith and LT Tra Thomas – all of whom were out because of injuries. Nonetheless, it was a great effort by the Giants. Defensive end Osi Umenyiora was the star of the game, setting a single game team record for sacks with six. Mathias Kiwanuka added three sacks, and Michael Strahan moved into first place on the Giants' all-time sack list with 133.5 in his career, passing the great Lawrence Taylor.