

Monday Morning Analysis – BY MATTHEW HATFIELD NFL – Monday, November 5, 2007

The big game on Sunday afternoon pitted the undefeated New England Patriots taking on the defending Super Bowl Champion Indianapolis Colts. Before we get to that matchup and breakdown all of the other games from Week 9 in the NFL, consider this: since 1990 there have been 38 teams to start a season 7-1 or 8-0 and have 37 of them have gone on to reach the playoffs with the lone exception being the 1996 Washington Redskins. That's good news for the Colts, Patriots and surprising Green Bay Packers.....

Patriots Avenge AFC Championship Loss, Rally Past Colts:

In the clutch, Bill Belichick, Tom Brady and the New England Patriots know how to win and finish off football games. Trailing 20-10 with about ten minutes to go in the fourth quarter, Brady led the Pats down the field for two critical touchdowns and the New England defense made a big play by creating turnover to preserve a hard-fought road victory over the team that ended their season last January when they rallied for a win in the AFC Conference Championship game.

For the Patriots revenge is awfully sweet. After passing for only 97 yards through three quarters of play, Brady passed for 158 yards over the game's final 15 minutes of action. Things didn't start out too well for Indianapolis, though as the former Patriots kicker Adam Vinatieri missed a 50-yard field goal. It was Vinatieri's first miss in the RCA Dome. Robert Mathis sacked Brady on the first play for the Patriots on offense and shortly thereafter the Pats had to punt, making it the first time all year that New England failed to score on its opening possession. At the end of one quarter it was the Colts on top 3-0 with New England running just nine plays.

Brady found Randy Moss for a touchdown on 3rd & Goal to put them up 7-3 with Stephen Gostkowski running his extra point mark to 44 of 44. The touchdown was Moss' 12th of the year and tied Stanley Morgan's team record. As flawless as the Patriots' signal caller has looked at times this year, sporting an unreal 30-2TD/Int. ratio, he made a couple of mistakes in this game. Both Antoine Bethea and Gary Brackett picked off Brady, leading to Indianapolis scores. Indy appeared to be going into half-time down 7-6, however, Manning hit halfback Joseph Addai for a 73-yard touchdown on a play that looked to be a simple short gain. Addai out-ran the entire Patriots defense (*by the way, how slow did they look?*) on his way to the end zone. For the half Addai racked up over 200 total yards of offense and the Colts led at intermission 13-7. New England had 102 yards in penalty with the Colts out-gaining them 229-114. Through three quarters that lead was cut to three, 13-10, but Brackett's pick led to a Manning one-yard touchdown run.

Indy's lead had doubled, 20-10, with New England needing some big plays to get back in front. They got them, the first on a 55-yard bomb from Brady to Moss, who was

this game's most dangerous, unstoppable player if you ask me. He adds a different dynamic to that offense. Bob Sanders, the Colts' star safety, was shaken up following the play. Brady's 32nd touchdown pass of the year went to Wes Welker, trimming their deficit to three again with 7:59 remaining in the ball game. Really, if you thought about it long and hard, as well as Indy played the Patriots were beating themselves with a franchise record for penalties in a game. Once they eliminated the penalties and didn't dig a hole, their offense just simply wasn't going to be slowed down by a Colts defense huffing and puffing.

On a few instances Indy had to take out pass rushers Mathis and Dwight Freeney to give them a breather. That worked to the Patriots' advantage. Brady connected with backup running back Kevin Faulk for a 13-yard touchdown pass after his 33-yard hookup with Donte Stallworth on one of the best passes that'll be thrown all season long. New England grabbed a 24-20 lead at the 3:15 mark. But could they have left Indy too much time to drive down the field for the game-winning touchdown? Nope. That's because Manning fumbled at home for the first time since 2005 as Jarvis Green forced it and Rosevelt Colvin recovered the loose ball. As much pressure as the Colts got on Brady in the first half, New England didn't stop bringing the heat when they could with Green, Colvin, Mike Vrabel and a few others.

The first excuse a Colts fan is going to have is 'well, we were without rookie offensive tackle Tony Ugoh from Arkansas and star wide receiver Marvin Harrison.' True, but would they have made the difference defensively down the stretch? Also, keep in mind the Pats were without safety Rodney Harrison in the playoff loss at the RCA Dome a season ago, so New England could say the same thing about why they lost. It cancels each other out in my opinion. The Indy defense didn't get it done down the stretch, the offense didn't score what they normally do, Manning made a crucial mistake in the fourth quarter and the Pats showed why they are the best team in football.

Fantastic Finish – Favre Finds Jennings Late... Again:

Last year the Green Bay Packers' wide receivers, Greg Jennings in particular, weren't always on the same page as future Hall-of-Fame quarterback Brett Favre, the league's all-time leader in touchdown passes thrown. Jennings often ran incorrect routes and it frustrated Favre and the Pack offense. This season things have changed and my oh my have they changed drastically. On ESPN Monday Night Football in overtime at Mile High, Favre fired an 82-yard game-winning touchdown pass to Jennings on the first play of OT. Then again this week in Kansas City, just six days removed from that Monday night magic, the second-year player out of Western Michigan hauled in a 60-yard bomb from #4 to put Green Bay on top 23-22 for good.

So many times this season the Packers have looked done in games only to pull out a win against a team probably more talented than them. The only loss they've suffered was at home against Chicago in a game they were dominating through thirty minutes of play. In the early going the Kansas City Chiefs' defensive line, led by Jared Allen, gave

Favre problems and very little time to set his feet and deliver the pigskin. While Favre finished 24-for-34 with 360 yards passing and two touchdowns, he did get intercepted twice in the first half and also had a pair of fumbles before the game was done. After one of his picks the Pack were flagged for a pass interference penalty and that led to KC's 7-6 lead at half-time.

In the second half the Chiefs grabbed the lead again when quarterback Damon Huard hit tailback Larry Johnson for a 30-yard touchdown screen. At that point Herm Edwards' KC team seemed to have good control of the game, up 14-13, especially in their building. But Green Bay got the big offensive play they needed and then a defensive one to augment Favre's furious finish. Corner Charles Woodson, who recovered a fumble and returned it for a pivotal score against the Washington Redskins, ran back an interception 51 yards to seal the deal... and keep Green Bay atop the NFC North.

Record-Setting Rookie Runs Wild:

Right now he's cooler than Barry White. Minnesota running back Adrian Peterson is quickly running to stardom in the National Football League. Against the team that had the best record in the sport a season ago, the San Diego Chargers, Peterson had a monster day by rushing for a new NFL single-game record 296 yards on 30 carries. A-Pete also added three touchdowns in the 35-17 upset of the lightning bolts. Oh yea, let's not forget this guy is a rookie out of Oklahoma who some questioned as far as being a Top Ten pick is concerned.

Powerful? No doubt. Speedy? He's got enough burst. Footwork and vision? That's there too. Shifty? For the most part. Able to catch out of the backfield? All he did was take a screen pass 60 yards for a touchdown in his pro debut... so check that one off the list as well. In a game where he opposed LaDainian Tomlinson, the league's reigning Most Valuable Player, Peterson dwarfed his counterpart with the nickname LT, which was once held by defensive great Lawrence Taylor. And we're not sure that guy, as exceptional as he was, could've brought Peterson down on Sunday. He ran with a purpose, like he was on a mission, and with quarterback Tavaris Jackson injured he stepped up his game to an entirely new level. In fact, when Antonio Cromartie returned a missed field goal 109 yards for a touchdown and the longest score in league history, it gave San Diego a 14-7 lead at intermission.

At that point, Minnesota could've gone into a shell and prepared for next week. That is after all what's supposed to happen, right? Wrong. Peterson, with great blocking from the guys up front such as Matt Birk, Bryant McKinnie and All-Pro guard Steve Hutchinson, had a resounding answer. We're watching the next great runner and he appears to be a truly special player in the making that made history on Sunday afternoon... as a 'rook.

Romeo's Browns (5-3) Beat Seahawks In OT:

Oh Romeo! Romeo Crennel and the Cleveland Browns are 5-3, fresh off an overtime win over the Seattle Seahawks by a count of 33-30. It's really an amazing, remarkable turnaround for a team that traded its opening day starting quarterback – Charlie Frye – to the team they beat on Sunday. Cleveland got hammered in Week by Pittsburgh by a count of 34-7. Many predicted at that point that they would suffer through another 13-loss season. Instead they are going to make a push towards, dare we say, the postseason? Gasp! Not the Browns? Yes, the Brownies!

Trailing by 15 points, this game was a good reflection of their season so far. The Seahawks were rolling behind quarterback Matt Hasselbeck, who started with 171 yards passing and a touchdown. Hasselbeck found D.J. Hackett on a 3rd & Goal play a touchdown where Hackett used his size to his advantage to beat Browns corner Daven Holley. Fast ahead to the early portion of the fourth quarter where the Browns are trailing 24-16 and put in the tough situation of 4th & 1 from the Seattle 16-yard line. Making a bold, gutsy move, Crennel called for them to go for it and quarterback Derek Anderson, a relatively unknown player at season's start, connected with talented tight end Kellen Winslow Jr. for a 14-yard strike. On a side note about Winslow – he's not a good blocker, but he's a tremendous pass catcher and tied a career-high with 11 receptions in this contest.

Jamal Lewis soon ran for his third touchdown of the night with Seahawks corner Marcus Trufant breaking up the two-point conversion attempt. If you don't succeed, try and try again. Lewis picked up his fourth rushing touchdown of the day, a new personal best, at the 2:17 mark to give Cleveland the lead. They tried the two-point conversion again and got it to grab a 30-27 edge. Seattle tied it on a Josh Brown field goal, but were unable to keep the Browns from getting in field goal position in overtime as Phil Dawson drilled the game-winner.

We found out a few things in this game. One, the Browns are doing an excellent job of blitz pickup. When a QB has time and quality receivers vs. the Seattle secondary, that generally means there will be some big plays that coincide with big numbers put up on the board. Sunday was no exception. The best team in the NFC West probably isn't as good as the third best team in the AFC North, speaking further to the power of that conference compared to the NFC. We'll soon find out whether or not Cleveland is a legitimate playoff contender as their next two games are on the road against divisional opponents Pittsburgh and Baltimore. If they can get no worse than a split of those two contests, then their chances of winning the division or a Wild Card berth are pretty decent.

Other Games:

Tampa Bay 17, Arizona 10: Jon Gruden's Buccaneers jumped out to a 10-3 lead and did it by running the football with Ernest Graham to the tune of a 47-7 rushing yard edge. Tampa Bay's defense kept Edgerrin James in check and laid a helmet on every Arizona receiver that went to catch a pass. The Cardinals were 0-for-7 on third downs at one point, whereas Tampa converted 12 of its first 20 third down tries. Behind the #1

rated quarterback in the league during the fourth quarter this year – Kurt Warner – Arizona was unable to make its comeback complete. Too many dropped passes, not enough productivity on the ground (23 rush yards) and when Warner was intercepted late, Head Coach Ken Whisenhunt didn't have a time-out left to challenge. The Bucs were able to dominate the time of possession category (43:07-16:53) with Graham and get after Warner with 18 hurries on the Cardinals' quarterback.

Tennessee 20, Carolina 7: Leading 10-0 out of the gate, the Tennessee Titans coached by Jeff Fisher and quarterback by Vince Young never looked back on their way to improving to 6-2 overall. This loss marked the first defeat on the road for Carolina this season. The Panthers saw Jon Kasay misfire on a 40-yard field goal in the first half, got a Ken Lucas interception in the end zone, but completed only three passes for 15 yards to their primary playmaker – wideout Steve Smith. In addition, left tackle Travelle Wharton and the Panthers' offensive line struggled against the Tennessee defensive line, led by Travis Laboy and d-tackle Albert Haynesworth, each of whom made a sack. Tennessee recorded four sacks of David Carr in the first half alone. Young posted a 0-2TD/Int. ratio, so he wasn't magnificent in this game by any stretch of the imagination. Who was? LenDale White picked up the slack with 31 rushes for 100 yards and a touchdown.

Buffalo 33, Cincinnati 21: Probably dropping out of the AFC playoff picture for good, the Cincinnati Bengals took a tumble in the second half, blowing a 14-13 lead at the break to a Buffalo team without that good of a defense. Dick Jauron's Bills are now positioning themselves for a Wild Card run with the way their offense has been performing, switching back from rookie Trent Edwards to J.P. Losman at quarterback. Fellow rookie, running back Marshawn Lynch, did his thing with over 150 yards rushing and a touchdown. As for Losman, he was superb in the opening half by completing 17 of 24 passes for 227 yards and a touchdown. Lee Evans finished with nine receptions for 165 yards and a touchdown. Despite a Glenn Holt kickoff return for a touchdown measuring 100 yards and a pretty decent first half by Carson Palmer (9-for-10 with 111 yards and a TD to start) for the most part, the Bengals lost because of their non-existent ground game. On 17 carries they racked up a minuscule 28 yards, so they virtually one-dimensional the whole game and that helped Buffalo's defense out in the final minutes.

New Orleans 41, Jacksonville 24: What proved to be one of the most exciting games of the day, the Jacksonville Jaguars and New Orleans Saints were tied 17-apiece through one quarter of play. From that point on, it was almost all New Orleans as they scored 21 unanswered points to go up 38-17 and won their fourth game in a row. Jacksonville, which received an 80-yard touchdown via Reggie Williams, ended the opening period on a 100-yard kickoff return for a touchdown from Maurice Jones Drew. Drew Brees completed 35 of 49 passes for 445 yards, 3TD's and zero interceptions. It's safe to say he played an outstanding game. Brees' favorite target was Marques Colston, the second-year player from Hofstra that caught ten passes for 159 yards. Defensively, the Saints made some big plays. Mike McKenzie returned an interception 75 yards to pay-dirt. Jason David and Jason Craft also picked off Jaguars quarterback Quinn Gray. Jack Del Rio's Jags find themselves in a must-win situation possibly next week when they

travel to Tennessee, while the Saints are right back in the thick of things in the NFC South title picture. Who would've predicted that following their Monday Night Football home loss to the Titans?

Atlanta 20, San Francisco 16: Perhaps the most boring game of the day, the Atlanta Falcons led 14-7 at the half against the San Francisco 49ers and held on at home for a 20-16 victory. The key to that victory was running back Warrick Dunn. At the break Dunn had 14 carries for 59 yards a touchdown; he ended up with precisely 100 yards rushing on 27 attempts. It was Dunn's first 100-yard performance since October of last year. Plain and simple, the 49ers haven't gotten hardly anything going offensively and that's with one of the most respected rushers in the league – Frank Gore – on their side. However, Gore didn't play in this game and they were forced to use Michael Robinson and Maurice Hicks. Quarterback Alex Smith was more mistake-prone than effective or productive, throwing three interceptions compared to no touchdowns. For San Fran, injuries have hurt them, but this team hasn't panned out like many of us who felt they could win the division heading into the season (*yes, I'm guilty of that*).

Washington 23, NY Jets 20 (OT): In a contest they were fortunate to win, the Washington Redskins trailed early, rallied, took the lead only to watch the Jets tie it up and prevailed in overtime to stay in the mix in the NFC East division race. Early on Eric Mangini's New York Jets went up by a count of 17-3 while starting second-year signal caller Kellen Clemens out of Oregon. Off the Jets' first turnover, the Redskins scored on a Clinton Portis touchdown run that appeared not to be a score, but New York didn't challenge and Washington got the two-point conversion to go ahead 20-17. The Jets then capped a 16-play drive with a 30-yard field goal by Mike Nugent to force overtime. When it was all said and done though, too much Portis and Shaun Suisham, the Redskins' kicker who tied a franchise record with five made field goals including the game-winner. Portis ran for a season-high 196 yards on 36 carries and had his first 100-yard performance of the season. Michigan rookie linebacker David Harris tallied 24 tackles in a loss.

Detroit 44, Denver 7: One has to consider Rod Marinelli for NFL Coach of the Year. Other than the draft selection of wide receiver Calvin Johnson #2 overall {by the way, Johnson three catches for 47 yards in the first half}, the Lions didn't make any real significant moves during the off-season. Nonetheless, the team is off to its first 6-2 start since 1999 season – the last time they reached the playoffs when they were beaten by Washington in the first round. Jon Kitna had 151 yards passing and a touchdown at half-time and Detroit suddenly found themselves up 30-0 through three quarters of play to a Denver team playing Patrick Ramsey at quarterback. Roy Williams really impressed me in this game with his superb, textbook route running against a secondary some hold in the highest regard around the league. What's the most fascinating stat about the Lions? They lead the league in takeaways. Last week against Chicago they made three interceptions in the end zone. Detroit did it once again in this game, scoring twice on defensive touchdowns, one of which was a Shaun Rogers 66-yard interception return. Their mammoth 340-pound defensive tackle also registered 2.5 sacks and help shut down the Broncos tough ground game.

Houston 24, Oakland 17: Not too much excitement in this one. Houston was on top 17-0 at the half behind a pair of rushing touchdowns, one each from Ahman Green and Ron Dayne. Gary Kubiak's Texans had 187 total yards of offense at the half. Meanwhile, the Raiders were limited to 123 total yards in the first half as Josh McCown threw two interceptions. Coming in Houston's rush attack ranked 30th in the NFL, so it was huge for them to get 122 yards from Dayne in the absence of both starting quarterback Matt Schaub and wide receiver Andre Johnson. Ronald Curry was held to just two catches for 12 yards, which was key for the Texans' defense as well. It may not be too long before we see JaMarcus Russell, the top pick in last April's draft, starting at QB for Oakland.

Dallas 38, Philadelphia 17: A first quarter turnover by Eagles quarterback Donovan McNabb contributed to quick points for the Dallas Cowboys, and even though Philadelphia would answer with a touchdown of their own to knot the game up at 7-apiece, the rout would soon be on. In front of a national television audience on NBC Sunday Night Football, the Cowboys out-gained their divisional foe 434-316. The key stat for Dallas was third down conversions as they were able to convert all but three of their 11 attempts on third down. Quarterback Tony Romo fired three touchdown passes, including one to Terrell Owens, who caught ten balls for 174 yards in his return to the city of Brotherly Love. Tight end Jason Witten gave the Eagles problems too, going 53 yards for a touchdown on a play where he lost his helmet. While some may wonder if the Eagles were distracted by the questions concerning their Head Coach Andy Reid and his family problems, Philly's offense was able to move the ball fairly well with Brian Westbrook, who totaled 155 yards of rushing/receiving. Problem is their defense didn't hold up too well and they lack another game-breaker to go alongside Westbrook.