
A Passing Fantasy Issue 136

NFLBP Player Newsletter 2005 Pre-season
ed Robert Crowther

Thanks for all the contributions this time, too much to fit in! I received a full set of season predictions from Darren, and an NFC set from Martyn, so I've put Darren's AFC set in to give Martyn a chance to write his AFC predictions for next issue ;) Thanks also to Chris Stones for his article, and also all those who sent predictions. The address for contributions is:

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Or email at 'gameplan@crowther.info'. If you want to discuss Gameplan with other coaches have a look at the Yahoo! Group:

<http://uk.groups.yahoo.com/group/gameplan>

THREEPEATING RAMS SAVOUR THE MOMENT

Martyn Williams

After taking a little time out to celebrate his third straight Super Bowl victory, and then a little more time out to recover from the ensuing hangover, Coach Williams finally sat down with the media to discuss the season just gone, and what lies ahead for his Rams.

"What an amazing season. The offence just clicked, the D did it's job and then come the post season we just turned it up another level and left everyone we played miles behind us. I think those 3 post season victories as a whole are probably the best BP has seen, at least for as long as I've been in the league. Commiserations to Rob, he just met our team on a day when everything worked perfectly for us. The pre-season result shows how different things could have been! But we were determined to win that game, not just for the historical importance, but also to gain revenge for that 17-14 defeat to the Raiders in the Super Bowl four seasons back. And yes, I can confirm that revenge is sweet, especially when it is administered with such ruthlessness!

This season looks like a corker, and I'm expecting a much tougher time of things in the NFC. A number of coaches have had a season or two to settle into their new teams, and with the Borg in at Tampa, Goz over in Green Bay and Chris at Carolina I'm certainly not expecting to represent the NFC in the Super Bowl for the fifth straight time... However my training regime is now firmly in place and the gameplan well understood by the players, and the squad is the strongest I've ever had, so I do think we'll be there or thereabouts come season end... ;o). I'm definitely looking forward to the new competition, I had decided early on last season that I'd leave the Rams at the end of the playoffs. One loss to NFC opposition in three seasons had put me in a position where I didn't even care if I won or lost against the Bengals or Pats weeks 6 and 12 as I knew it was more than likely I'd still end up with HFA and a chance to avenge any defeat to the AFC in the Super Bowl. But now things look interesting again so I'm sticking around - sorry!"

MESSAGE SECTION

Any short messages you feel like sharing with the rest of the league can go here. Even if you don't feel up to making a full contribution you can still have your say! This is actually a message from last season, sadly it still applies:

Dave Pinder to Everyone: "Good luck to all in BP for the new season, it looks to be as tough as ever and come on AFC, lets win back the Bowl!!!!!"

PREDICTIONS COMPETITION

Darren Birtchnell

I'll be running a predictions competition this year, with turn credits available as the prize. How these credits will be divided up depends on how many donations we get. There are currently 8 credits in the pot, courtesy of myself, Peter Kneil, Martyn Williams & Chris

Stones. If anyone else wants to donate a couple, you're more than welcome!

The competition will be based purely on guessing the winning margin for each game, with bonus points available for getting the margin correct, or being within a few points of the correct margin, as follows:

- Predict the winning team - 2 points
- Predict the correct winning margin - 10 bonus points
- Within 1 point of the winning margin - 5 bonus points
- Within 2 points - 4 bonus points
- Within 3 points - 3 bonus points
- Within 4 points - 2 bonus points
- Within 5 points - 1 bonus point

So as you can see, there are a lot of points available if you get the margin right. Hopefully this might dissuade people from playing the percentages! So for example, if you predict someone to win by 7, but they only win by 3, you would get 2 points for the correct team winning & a further 2 bonus points for being 4 points off the actual margin. I hope that's clear enough for everyone?!

To 'qualify' for the competition, you will need to have sent in predictions for at least 8 weeks during the season. And you can also predict the outcome of your own game, if you're feeling cocky...

2005 SEASON PREVIEW - NFC

Martyn Williams

NFC EAST

This is a tough one to predict. I can't help thinking that the Eagles lost the East last season more than the Redskins won it. The Giants finished the season well and the Cowboys I'm sure were just playing for time, looking ahead to this year. So, as I said, very difficult to predict! I expect it to be a close fought division with only the champion seeing the post season, and I'm going to go with the experience of Philadelphia, and then take a flyer and suggest the Cowboys come second. Final Standings: Eagles, Cowboys, Redskins, Giants

NFC CENTRAL

This division has been weak ever since Coach Baird left the Packers 5 seasons ago, but all that is set to change. Initially I would have said that APP and Troy had this division sewn up for Tampa, but then Goz appears in Green Bay and throws everything wide open! The Buccaneers have a head start on training and squad management, but Goz has proved time and again in other leagues that he can beat APP (unlike me!) so I expect it to be close between these two. The Bears will give a good account of themselves but are unlikely to trouble the Bay teams, and Detroit will fall to the bottom of the pile. So who will win the Central? If it was just Goz vs. APP I'd say Goz, but add Troy into the mix and I'm going with the Bucs, with Green Bay snatching a wild card. Final Standings: Bucs, Packers, Bears, Lions

NFC WEST

This division has a habit of sending three teams to the playoffs, but I don't see that happening this season. As always, I hate predicting great things for my team, but I can't see me not winning this division. Yes I have tough inter-conference games again, but then the Ravens and Bengals aren't exactly easy so the 49ers and Panthers have their work cut out to. So I expect to win the West again, but not with as good a record as I've had the last four seasons, I can see me losing 5 games. So who will nab a wildcard behind me? Well we can forget about the Saints, unless they get a new coach, and soon, they look a good bet for propping up the NFC. The 49ers have had a season to settle in with Coach Eden, and did well to reach the divisional round of the playoffs in his first season. However their squad for this season is by far the smallest in the league, and having played (and never lost to!) both coaches before (albeit against Chris in other leagues) I think the Panthers will have the edge and should sneak the final NFC wildcard. Final Standings: Rams, Panthers, 49ers, Saints

Playoff Predictions: Far too early to say with any confidence this season! I'm just hoping that if I get there I can avoid APP and Troy!!! ;o)

2005 SEASON PREVIEW - AFC Darren Birtchnell

AFC EAST

The Patriots won the division comfortably last season, and I see no reason why they shouldn't retain their title. The squad looks strong in every area and they have a good spread of experience throughout the roster. Plus they have a top quality coach so I think it's New England all the way here. The Jets stuttered a bit last year after reaching the playoffs the year before. For them to get back to post-season play they'll need to win more games against the other potential playoff teams. They're capable of doing it and should again finish second in the division, but the playoffs may just be a bridge too far once again. Miami are due a winning record this season, they tend to have a good season every 2 or 3 years. However, they have the 2nd smallest roster in the league and face the Raiders, Patriots & Bengals in the first 4 weeks. Coupled with tougher inter-conference games than they might have expected, I think Miami will do no better than 8-8 this season. Buffalo will prop up the division once again. Their roster is a bit uneven in terms of distribution of player strengths and they have shown very little over the past couple of seasons to make me think they can mount a challenge this time around. Will Coach Bruce be able to prove me wrong?

Final standings: Patriots, Jets, Dolphins, Bills.

AFC CENTRAL

Arguably the toughest division in BP. Cleveland won their first division title last season and looked very impressive in the process, only dropping 2 games. They are explosive on offense, albeit a bit unconventional at times, and the defense does enough for them to win. However, out of all of last year's playoff teams only the 49ers conceded more points, and opposing offenses will be looking to take advantage of a possible weakness this year. Baltimore finished last season on a good run and dumped my Bengals out of the playoffs in the process. Peter Kneil has now had 2 full drafts and has the team how he wants it.

There doesn't appear to be any weaknesses in the roster and Peter has shown he knows how to win the big games, so can they take it a step further this year? Cincinnati were a bit of a disappointment last year, finishing with their worst record since 1997, the second year of play in BP and my first full season. The offensive line was a major factor in the poor offensive showing, which has been addressed through coaching this off-season. Other than a lack of experience the roster is OK, so can the Bengals finally get back to where they think they belong? Poor old Tennessee. They've had top pick in the draft 2 seasons running and things don't look a whole lot better heading into this season. They have an inexperienced roster and have been lacking leadership for a while now. However, rumours are that Derek Barton will be taking over during the season, and this will immediately turn the Titans around. It will probably be too late for them to challenge this year, but they will be unrecognisable next season if Dex does land in the hotseat.

I'm not going to predict the final standings, I don't want to tempt fate!

AFC WEST

Oakland have won 8 out of the 9 division titles since BP began (if memory serves) and they should make it 9 out of 10. They have a good-looking roster with a lot of experience spread around and of course they have an excellent coach. They may face more of a challenge than last year, but they should still finish top. Last season the Chiefs slumped badly when they looked on course for a playoff place. Coach Cox will be annoyed with that and will be looking to make amends this time round. They are aggressive on both sides of the ball, so expect some more shootouts at Arrowhead Stadium this season. You would expect them to win their first 2 games this season, but then it starts to get a bit tricky with Baltimore, Cincinnati, Oakland, Philly & Cleveland so they'll need to make a good start to keep in contention. Seattle appear to have levelled off over the last few seasons. They were a playoff calibre team a while ago, but those days seem long gone now. With so much more competition in the league now it's hard to see them recapturing their form of

old, although they have got the players to do it. Denver are in a similar position to Tennessee, except there isn't a new coach waiting to step in and turn them around. That's probably all it would need, as they have the makings of a good team on paper, but it looks like another season of hard work in Colorado.

Final standings: Raiders, Chiefs, Seahawks, Broncos.

SPOTLIGHT ON CAROLINA

Chris Stones

Three pre-season games since I took over which have allowed me to experiment with a few different ideas with mixed results. I had a decent win over the Giants, but was then on the receiving end of a tonking by Philly and a stuttering performance against Seattle in last week's official pre-season round of games. Should really have won that Seattle game, but my special teams decided to take the day off, resulting in a net punting average of under 20 yards, a couple of big kick returns allowed and 2 missed game breaking field goals. Both of these were from less than 35 yards and the second came in overtime - most annoying. To be fair I waived my kicker and punter order for me to concentrate on some of the weak areas on offence, so I suppose I can't complain too much. However training is non-existent on ST as well, so that's something I can do something about and I'll be addressing ASAP.

So finally on to the proper stuff, and first up is the Lions. Not really sure what to expect, so I'll be going in with a pretty standard plan and hoping for the best. Very much looking forward to the season and hoping I can at least provide something for the Rams to think about in the NFC West. Having plans to challenge them for the division might overly optimistic, but sod it, you never get anywhere by setting your sights low. Plus with some of the new coaches, the NFC will become a bit of a feisty place to be I would think and the Rams aim for a 'fourpeat' certainly ain't gonna be easy. Good luck to all for the coming season.

PREDICTIONS

Dave Pinder: Bengals by 3, Jets by 7, Raiders by 10, Chiefs by 7, Browns by 10, Ravens by 7, Bucs by 7, Packers by 2, Rams by 14, 49ers by 3, Panthers by 3, Saints by 3

Peter Kneil: Patriots by 7, Jets by 10, Raiders by 21 (No I'm not creeping!), Chiefs by 10, Browns by 17, Ravens by 7 (Not sure if I do my own games or not), Redskins by 3, Eagles by 3, Rams by 28, 49ers by 17, Panthers by 3, Saints by 7

Darren Birtchnell: Jets by 16, Raiders by 19, Chiefs by 23, Browns by 17, Ravens by 19, Bucs by 14, Packers by 9, Rams by 21, 49ers by 18, Panthers by 6, Bears by 6

Chris Stones: Bengals by 7, Jets by 6, Raiders by 17, Chiefs by 14, Browns by 4, Broncos by 10, Buccs by 14, Packers by 7, Rams by 20, 49ers by 6, Panthers by 7, Bears by 10