
A Passing Fantasy Issue 157

NFLBP Player Newsletter 2006 Week One

ed Robert Crowther

Thanks to Darren, Peter and Martyn for their contributions this time, a bumper crop of season previews. The address for contributions is:

35a Dukes Avenue
Finchley
London
N3 2DE

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>

2006 SEASON PREVIEW - AFC **Darren Birtchnell**

AFC East

New England have owned this division since Dave Pinder took over as coach, but now that he has been forced to reduce his involvement in gameplan the division becomes wide open. The Pats have the division's best roster, so you would still expect them to win their share of games, but the more experienced coaches should be able to beat them. This then leaves the door open for Miami to claim their first division title in a while. However, they have a small squad and are well known for their inconsistency, so making a good start to the season is important. That looks like a good possibility as they have some very winnable games early in the season, so if they can get some momentum going they could be a good bet for the division. The Jets tailed off badly at the end of last season, losing their last 6 games. The roster looks in decent shape and they made the playoffs 2 seasons ago, so they're capable and could fill the void which the Pats may leave. Buffalo only won 3 games in the regular season, yet they have won their last 4 this off-season, which included beating the Lions to win the Bronze Bowl. If they can carry on that sort of form they could well spring a surprise, but I still expect them to finish last in the division.

Final standings: Dolphins, Patriots, Jets, Bills

AFC Central

Cincinnati regained the division title last year en route to having the AFC's best record, before they went out of the playoffs at the first hurdle courtesy of the Chiefs. The roster is still smaller than most, but experience is building up at the key positions and the Bengals are hopeful of another good season. Baltimore also got dumped out of the playoffs by KC and will be hoping they don't have to settle for a wildcard this year. There are no apparent weaknesses on the roster and Coach Kneil know's what he's doing, so I expect the Ravens to be there or thereabouts again this year. Will the real Cleveland Browns please stand up? After posting 14 wins the previous season, they stuttered their way to a disappointing 7-9 record last time out. They had a tough start last season and never really recovered from it, so they will be hoping for a better start this time. They beat Carolina to claim the Silver Bowl a couple of weeks ago, so that shows they are still capable. Tennessee are still drifting down the creek without a paddle and it's hard to see them righting that until there's a new skipper at the helm. Other than the O-line the roster looks OK, so they might pick up a few wins, but I wouldn't bank on it.

Not making any predictions here!

AFC West

The Raiders have always been one of the best teams in the league and I fully expect that to continue. However, Rob is a bit concerned with how his roster will hold up until reinforcements arrive, so teams playing them early on might have a better chance. But there is still a lot of experience there and once the O-line is addressed it should be business as usual in Oakland. Kansas City will be hoping to take advantage of Oakland's situation and also to improve on last year's impressive showing of making the AFC Championship Game by winning twice on the road to get there. However, the sharp-eyed amongst you might have no-

ticed the league report said Ben Cox takes over as coach, so does this mean he wasn't there for last season's playoff run? Denver had a great run to end last season, taking a few big scalps on the way. They have the league's biggest roster and no real weaknesses, so opposition can't afford to take them lightly this year. Seattle had their worst season for a while last year, finishing bottom of the division. Other than at WR they don't have a lot of experience, which could be a telling factor in a potentially tough division.

Final standings: Raiders, Chiefs, Broncos, Seahawks

2006 SEASON PREVIEW - NFC

Martyn Williams

NFC East

Another year of woe for the NFC East, as no team really looks like a bona fide Super Bowl contender. The Eagles look best equipped to remain at the top of the pile with the largest and most experienced squad, and NFLBP old timer Paul Gaines still in charge. The Redskins should be their nearest rivals once again but a weak D line will let them down. It's about time the Giants finally came good under Coach Steele, most the pieces seem to be in place now but starting a rookie QB could be a mistake. Of course the Bengals won Super Bowl IV with a rookie under centre so that's no reason for the Giants to fail this year but it does make things tougher. The Cowboys have the makings of a good squad but a weak O line and general inexperience across the board will ensure another poor season in Dallas.

Eagles, Redskins, Giants, Cowboys

NFC Central

It's been a long time coming, but this season should see the Packers rise to the top of the Central again. Memories of their repeating Champions of Super Bowls II and III under Coach Baird are now dim but in Coach Gorner they have finally found a suitable replacement who will once again have them challenging for the top prize. APP and Troy's retirement in Tampa opens the door for Green Bay and Lambeau could well be hosting the NFC Championship Game this season. Tampa still have a strong squad and although they are currently

lacking direction should still be good enough to push for the final wildcard. The Lions continue to tread water under Coach Torpey, always competitive but never making the step up to postseason victories, I see no reason for this season to be any different. And in Chicago the Bears still struggle – with what must be the weakest DL in the league it is difficult to see them putting up much opposition this season

Packers, Buccs, Lions, Bears

NFC West

So the big question is, did last season's Super Bowl defeat signal the end of a dynasty in St Louis or was it merely a blip against their continued domination of NFLBP? Well there will be strong competition from Green Bay and Carolina this season but no one else really looks to come close in the NFC. The team comes back stronger than last season, the only real loss being 12 year veteran TE Cam Cleeland. Question marks have been raised due to the Rams seemingly small squad on paper, but people forget that the Rams O is packed full of players with big play abilities. Perhaps the rest of the NFC's best hope is that Coach Williams move to a 4-3 D doesn't suit his team. Or that Coach Stones improves upon an excellent first season in Carolina and achieves what he came so close to doing last year, winning the West and pushing the Rams out of HFA and into a wildcard spot. He has the squad at his disposal and a future star at QB, perhaps this time around he'll have the necessary amount of luck that all successful teams need as well. New Orleans improved significantly last season under Coach Briggs, doing something unheard of in years by beating the Rams twice! But his untimely departure just cost them a play off spot and it is unlikely they will improve further this season. The 49ers were a huge disappointment last season and so it is difficult to know what to make of them for this one. They could be the NFC's surprise team, but based on recent results they will struggle.

Rams, Panthers, Saints, 49ers

Super Bowl Prediction: A rematch of Super Bowls III and IV - Bengals v Packers

RAVENOUS (The view from Baltimore)**Peter Kneil**

I think BP will be very open this year. The now departed coach Pinder has proved that the Rams are beatable and up and coming teams like Kansas, Carolina, Green Bay and, dare I say, the Ravens will challenge the old guard of the Raiders, Rams and Bengals.

NFC Preview

The Buccs are now coachless which leaves this Conference between the Rams, Panthers & Packers in my view. Martyn's Rams have one of the weakest squads on paper but I'd still make him Superbowl favourite. However, the other two teams look very strong so will this be the year the Rams don't make the Superbowl?

AFC Preview

No doubt that the Chiefs were the surprise package last season. They didn't really look strong enough to go far in the Playoffs but dumped my Ravens and then Darren's Bengals out before narrowly losing to New England. Interesting by the way to see that Ben Cox has taken over from,er, Ben Cox as coach! I think this is between the Raiders, Bengals, Chiefs and the Ravens. I'm hoping to win my first AFC Central title but Darren won't give it up easily and let's not discount the Browns. I think we can safely rule out the Titans, after all no-one could possibly lose to them right? I'm not sure that my inexperienced defence will be strong enough to go all the way but I'd be pretty happy if I could at least win the Division (especially if I clinch it in Week 16 at the Bengals). So to sum up, it's the Rams and Ravens in the Superbowl with a last gasp D DL WC 92 yard TD and two point conversion for the Ravens to win 54-53!

PREDICTIONS COMPETITION**Darren Birtchnell**

I'll be running the predictions competition in exactly the same way as last year. Just in case you've forgotten, here's how it will work.

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. As an 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 & 2 bonus points.

We're also looking for turn credits to be contributed to a prize fund, as we did last year. Myself and Peter are willing to donate some, so if anyone else is feeling generous please let me know.

And remember, you need to predict at least 8 weeks worth of games to qualify for the prizes, so send those predictions to Rob asap!

WEEK ONE PREVIEW

Patriots at Browns - Cleveland looked quite competent in pre-season and will be eager to get off to a good start at home, but I would be surprised to see them knock off the defending champs with their coach only recently departed. PATRIOTS BY 7

Dolphins at Titans - Miami looked very impressive last week and while they can blow hot and cold, no one has sucked for so long as Tennessee. DOLPHINS BY 10

Jets at Raiders - Oakland have concerns about their OL, but at least they're starting at home. New York are probably good enough on the DL to keep the Raiders in check, so it will come down to whether the Oakland defense can achieve the same.

Bills at Chiefs - Buffalo performed much better in pre-season than KC, but it would need a big improvement over last season for them to cause an upset here. CHIEFS

BY 10

Bengals at Broncos – Cincinnati should be able to see off Denver but may have some concerns about their defense following pre-season. BENGALS BY 14

Ravens at Seahawks – Baltimore lost out narrowly last week to superbowl hot tips Green Bay so will fancy their chances against a lacklustre Seattle team. RAVENS BY 10

Eagles at Lions – Detroit looked pretty bad last week but are always good for a surprise or two throughout the season. Philly want to start off better than last year and not get into a dogfight for the division. LIONS BY 3

Redskins at Bears – Washington got obliterated last week, Chicago won but it was only by one point, and they were playing the Titans. I suspect the 'Skins aren't quite as bad as they showed last week and will grab a win in the Windy City. REDSKINS BY 7

Giants at Rams – St Louis get back to what they do best, beating up on their NFC rivals. RAMS BY 17

Cowboys at Panthers – Dallas will be challenging Tennessee for the top draft pick again this year, no difficulties here for Carolina. PANTHERS BY 20

Buccs at Saints – Two teams unsure of their direction this season. New Orleans should have the edge at home providing they can keep a hold of the powerful Tampa offense. SAINTS BY 3

Packers at 49ers – Green Bay start what many feel will be a journey to the superbowl with what should be a relatively untroubled trip to San Francisco. PACKERS BY 14

WEEK ONE PREDICTIONS

Darren Birtchnell - Browns by 3, Dolphins by 17, Raiders by 13, Chiefs by 10, Bengals by 8, Ravens by 7, Eagles by 4, Redskins by 6, Rams by 20, Panthers by 10, Saints by 3, Packers by 13

Peter Kneil - Pats by 7, Dolphins by 21, Raiders by 12, Chiefs by 17, Bengals by 21, Ravens by 7, Eagles by 7, Redskins by 7, Rams by 21, Panthers by 17, Buccs by 3, Packers by 13