



## AN EARLY LOOK AT FOOTBALL, AND OTHER FOLLIES

By Kerry Schmidt 09-26-2004

He's back! Here in southeast Louisiana, we sweated and worried, but dodged Hurricane Ivan last week. Well, the ghost of Ivan, or Ivan Jr. is back today (9/23). We are getting stronger winds and more rain than we got with Big Ivan.

And, there is hurricane Jeanne that, at press time, is predicted to slam into Florida, around Ft. Meyers.

So, for the second week in a row, football games could be affected. The Dolphins are at home, as are college teams Florida and Florida State. Then we have three more hurricanes lined up out there. Come on down to the Gulf Coast.

An early look at the NFL.

First off, the season opened on a Thursday night for the second year in a row, and this will be the likely format for the future.

OK, but I want to watch football, not MTV. If I wanted to watch music videos and hip-hop slop and rap crap, I would go to the cruddy cable stations that cater to that junk. Just play the damn game. I don't need a one hour build-up, computerized song and prance-dance routine. Elton John, I can handle, but not at an NFL game.

Long way to the Super Bowl, but here is how I rank the teams with the best/worst chances after just two weeks.

In the NFC, I say Philadelphia, Minnesota and Seattle, in that order.

In the AFC, I have New England, Indianapolis and Baltimore.

The worst? In the NFC, I have Arizona, New Orleans and San Francisco. The AFC's bottom feeders are Miami, Pittsburgh and a tie with Buffalo and Kansas City.

The top teams.

Philadelphia. They have been to the NFC Championship game the last two years. But with the addition of Terrell (Sharpie pen) Owens and on defense, "The Freak," Jevon Kearse, they have added the two final touches which should lead to SB. When they lost Deuce Staley to free agency, then apparently have not missed a beat with Brian Westbrook, who is averaging 8.1 yards per touch, tops in the league.

Minnesota.

They still have arguably the top offense in the league and they have strengthened their defense this season. Only statistical drawback is the six consecutive road losses, including three last season to doormats Oakland, San Diego and Arizona.

Seattle. Mike Holmgren has finally melded his team into the same mold he had in Green Bay, where he won a SB. QB Matt Hasselback is somewhat unknown, but he is a Pro-Bowl caliber QB and with Shaun Alexander at RB, they are potent. On defense, the addition of defensive end Grant Wistrom from St. Louis has paid big dividends, both on the field and as a team leader.

Worst. Arizona. Bad team, bad owner, but finally have a decent coach in Dennis Green. Maybe he can turn it around in the future.

Saints. I worked the game against SF last week, and, well, the Saints are the most undisciplined team in the league. And it starts with the coaching. I must be careful what I



# OFF THE WALL SPORTS

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write, but let's just say that the off-field behavior of one coach in particular hardly sets a good example. And, I stand by my statement that Aaron Brooks is not smart enough to ever be a top notch QB.

After the game last week, the coaches had the same, lame answers.

Question: Since the Saints and CBS and their leaders both have very little credibility, do you think they are related?

49'ers. Totally new team, very young, and, well, their glory days are long gone and with the present owners and the complete departure of genius Bill Walsh, their future is bleak. In the AFC, I listed New England first because they are the reigning champs and they picked up a couple of big-time free agents. They have won 17 consecutive games, one shy of the league record.

Colts. Peyton Manning, in my opinion, is the best overall QB in the league and they have one of the top RB's in Edgerian James. Only question is still the defense. After two games, they are 20<sup>th</sup> in the league versus the run and 28<sup>th</sup> in yards per carry.

Baltimore. Ray Lewis anchors one of the best D's in the league. Early worry is All-Pro RB, Jamal Lewis has been held under 100 yards for two consecutive games for the first time since 2002.

Worst. Miami. See Ricky Williams (in his hookah tent somewhere in Australia). Weak set of QB's doesn't help either.

Pittsburgh. Rookie top pick, QB Ben Roethlisberger will start this week. Injuries and age make this a poor year.

Buffalo. QB controversy. Teammates are losing confidence in Drew Bledsoe. Add an aging offensive line that allowed an NFL high 49 sacks last year and is worst this season after two games with eight.

Kansas City. High powered offense has gone south and awful defense is still awful.

Close with a local note. Baseball. The Zephyrs signed an agreement to be the Class AAA farm team of the Montreal Expos. Great. A horrible MLB team with no owner and, at press time, no place to play next year.

I wonder how the Miami Hurricanes will do this weekend?