

WEEK 1



EFL

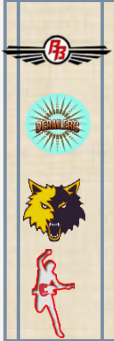
2023

ELITE FOOTBALL LEAGUE

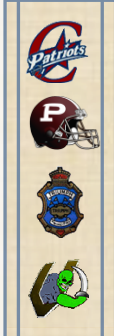
We're Number 1!

October 8, 2023

EAST



CENTRAL



WEST



NORTH



COASTAL



SOUTH



PICKED APART!

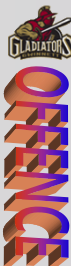
Tariq Woolen
Pickering Spartans

Pickering Spartans' cornerback **Tariq Woolen** leaps in front of Budapest's **Stefon Diggs** and picks off a pass from **Aaron Rodgers** in 2nd quarter action at Thermopylae Stadium. It was the first of two interceptions by the second-year star, who would return the second one for a touchdown to open up the 2nd half. The Spartans were in control of this game throughout, using the run game and an unyielding defence to humble the North Stars 40-17. Rodgers threw 3 interceptions and completed less than 50% of his passes on the day. In the Pacific Conference, the Week One showdown between Virden and Twin Cities went the Violators' way, as **Patrick Mahomes** threw 2 TD passes and **Malik Hooker** posted 6 on a scoop-and-score after a **Breece Hall** fumble in a 35-27 win. (Story inside)



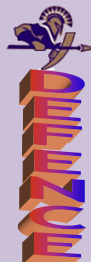
Who was slick in Week One?

"Brylcreem" THE EFL'S FIRST SPONSOR



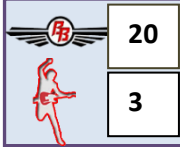
Tua Tagovailoa
QB
Georgia Gladiators

21 of 27, 250 yds, 5 TDs, 1 INT. 129.4 QBR. Stood tall and delivered.



Tariq Woolen
CB
Pickering Spartans

2 T, 2 PD, 2 INT (76 yds – 1 TD). Did not allow a complete pass against him.


20
3

Justin Fields connected with **DeAndre Hopkins** for a 6-yard TD pass to cap the game's opening drive, giving Bruxelles all the points they would need to defeat New Jersey. The Bomber defence was in control throughout, giving up just a FG to rookie **Chad Ryland** near the end of the 1st half. The Wrecking Balls had to punt 6 times and turned the ball over on downs 3 times. **Samson Ebukam** had a big day, finishing with 9 tackles, 1 sack, 2 stuffs and 3 QB hits on beleaguered QB, **Daniel Jones**. Bruxelles fumbled twice but recovered both times. NJ was penalized 9 times for 65 yards.

10-08-2023 Stone Pony Shore Temp:77 Wind:0-5 None No Line MVP:Fields HFA:ON(3)

	1	2	3	4	Tot
2023 Bruxelles (1-0)	7	3	7	3	20
2023 New Jersey (0-1)	0	3	0	0	3

Passing

BRX: Fields 20/13 146 Yds TD
 NJ: Jones 35/21 158 Yds

Rushing

BRX: Fournette 12/48, Foreman 13/41, Herbert 4/27 TD, Fields 8/26
 NJ: Montgomery 8/34, Jones 6/23, McKinnon 3/20, Samuel 2/5, Brightwell 1/1

Receiving

BRX: Godwin 6/66, Hopkins 4/52 TD, Wilson 2/20, Fournette 1/8
 NJ: Samuel 5/72, Allen 5/18, McKinnon 4/15, Hooper 3/18, McLaurin 2/18, Doubs 2/17

Defense

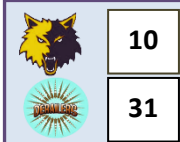
BRX: Ebukam Sk 9-Tk
 NJ: Heyward FF 9-Tk, Floyd Sk 4-Tk, Hughes 8-Tk

Injuries

BRX: Moreau 1
 NJ: Armstead 7

Misc

BRX: Maher 2/3 FG 41 Lg
 NJ: Ryland 1/1 FG 42 Lg


10
31

Lamar Jackson threw TD passes of 10 and 5 yards to **Russell Gage** and rushed for 42 yards to overcome an early 10-point deficit as Buffalo won its home opener. Coyote QB, **Bryce Young**, in his rookie debut, rebounded from an early interception to find **Luke Musgrave** for an 8-yard TD pass to give Cobb County a 10-0 lead early in the 2nd quarter. But things went downhill after that for the Young and the visitors. Jackson got Buffalo on the board in the 2nd quarter with his first TD pass then partnered with **AJ Dillon** to grind down the Coyote defence on the way to 24 points in the 2nd half.

10-08-2023 Highmark Stadium Temp:72 Wind:5-15 None No Line MVP:Jackson HFA:ON(1)

	1	2	3	4	Tot
2023 Cobb County (0-1)	3	7	0	0	10
2023 Buffalo (1-0)	0	7	10	14	31

Passing

CB: Young 30/17 176 Yds TD 2 Int
 BUF: Jackson 34/25 209 Yds 2 TDs

Rushing

CB: Etienne 12/47, Young 2/14, Ridder 1/1
 BUF: Dillon 15/67 TD, Jackson 12/42, Johnson 9/41, Bigsby 6/21 TD

Receiving

CB: Pittman Jr. 5/72, Strong Jr. 4/13, Cooks 3/33, Addison 2/20, Musgrave 2/29 TD
 BUF: Gage 8/71 2 TDs, Woods 7/65, Fant 4/38, Robinson 3/13, Johnson 1/4, Dillon 1/17

Defense

CB: Graham Sk 5-Tk, Oluokun 10-Tk, Payne Sk 4-Tk, Kancey 9-Tk
 BUF: Granderson Int 5-Tk

Injuries

CB: Adams 14, White 9, Jones 9, Woods 6
 BUF:

Misc

CB: Moody 1/1 FG 53 Lg
 BUF: Elliott 1/1 FG 30 Lg, TOP 38:31



27



35

Avonte Maddox intercepted **Patrick Mahomes** on the opening drive to set up a **Trevor Lawrence** sneak for a TD and give the Triumph an early 7-0 lead. But the Violators scored TDs on their next 3 drives and added a defensive score when **Malik Hooker** returned a **Breece Hall** fumble 69 yards for a TD, to take a 28-10 lead at halftime. Hall made up for his earlier miscue with an 8-yard TD run in the 3rd quarter, but Virde would reclaim those points on a 9-yard TD pass to **Ja'Marr Chase**. The Virde D held Twin Cities to 10 points after that, the game ending on a 4th & 28 bomb incomplete.

10-08-2023 TERRORDOME Temp:79 Wind:Calm None No Line MVP:Mahomes HFA:ON(3)

	1	2	3	4	Tot
2023 Twin Cities (0-1)	7	3	7	10	27
2023 Virde (1-0)	7	21	7	0	35

Passing

TCT: Lawrence 36/26 281 Yds TD
 WV: Mahomes 29/19 273 Yds 2 TDs Int

Rushing

TCT: Hall 16/72 TD, Wilson 9/48, Duvernay 1/17, Lawrence 5/9 TD, Edwards-Helaire 3/9
 WV: Conner 14/68 2 TDs, Mahomes 5/66, Akers 3/2

Receiving

TCT: Moore 9/108 TD, Lockett 4/38, Higbee 4/32, Hall 2/32, Wilson 2/13, Bateman 2/44
 WV: Hill 8/159, Chase 6/80 TD, Olave 2/20, Conner 2/6, Hockenson 1/8 TD

Defense

TCT:
 WV: Judon Sk 2-FF 5-Tk, Cox Sk FF 5-Tk, Mosley 12-Tk

Injuries

TCT: Moseley 11, Bradbury 4
 WV:

Misc

TCT: Hopkins 2/2 FG 45, Hall F-L, Love FR
 WV: Conner F-L, Hooker FR(TD)



26



20

The Crusaders exploded for 17 points in the 3rd quarter to erase a 10-9 halftime deficit, then their defence held off the Pats' rally to give Peg City a hard-fought win. A Pats turnover on downs at their own 33 on the opening drive of the 2nd half set up a **Younghoe Koo** FG, then back-to-back interceptions thrown by **Kenny Pickett** were turned by **Ryan Tannehill** into back-to-back TD passes of 5 yards to **Jakobi Meyers** and 40 yards to **Brandon Aiyuk** to key the comeback. The Pats, who had built their 1st half lead on long drives, worked methodically to post 10 points in the 4th but ran out of time.

10-08-2023 Patriot Place Temp:75 Wind:Calm No Line MVP:Tannehill HFA:ON(1)

	1	2	3	4	Tot
2023 Peg City (1-0)	6	3	17	0	26
2023 Charleswood (0-1)	0	10	0	10	20

Passing

PCC: Tannehill 22/16 201 Yds 3 TDs, Jones 1/1 10 Yds
 CHP: Pickett 29/16 191 Yds TD 2 Int

Rushing

PCC: Kamara 8/27, Barkley 12/21
 CHP: Pickett 6/53 TD, Dobbins 14/49, Pacheco 13/12, Gibson 4/11, Drake 4/5

Receiving

PCC: Kamara 5/33 TD, Aiyuk 4/81 TD, Meyers 3/34 TD, Sutton 3/35, Barkley 2/28
 CHP: Kelce 8/94, Chark 3/32 TD, Agholor 2/27, Smith-Schuster 2/29, Singletary 1/9

Defense

PCC: Lawrence 2-Sks 7-Tk, Jones Sk 9-Tk, Hutchinson Sk 5-Tk, Ramsey Int 5-Tk
 CHP: Carter FF 7-Tk, Ojabo Sk 4-Tk, Queen 8-Tk

Injuries

PCC:
 CHP: Darby 11, Davis 2

Misc

PCC: Koo 2/3 FG 51 Lg, Barkley F-L
 CHP: Lutz 2/2 FG 46 Lg, Emerson FR



6
31



Christian McCaffrey caught TD passes of 4 yards and 7 yards from **Jared Goff** and ran in another from 2 yards out to star for the Convicts in a breezy win over the Pilots. McCaffrey had 21 touches before being relieved in the 4th with Chino well out in front, 28-6. Seattle struggled to move the ball, making just 8 1st downs and netting just 213 yards of total offence. **Carson Wentz** threw 2 interceptions in his first start with the team, both setting up TDs by Chino, and lost a fumble in Convict territory early in the 2nd quarter when the game was still in reach. **Zaire Franklin** forced 2 fumbles for Chino.

10-08-2023 The Big House Temp:104 Wind:Calm None No Line MVP:McCaffrey HFA:ON(4)

	1	2	3	4	Tot
2023 Seattle (0-1)	0	6	0	0	6
2023 Chino (1-0)	7	14	7	3	31

Passing

SEA: Wentz 20/13 160 Yds 2 Int, Lock 4/3 10 Yds
 CHI: Goff 27/20 169 Yds 3 TDs Int

Rushing

SEA: Walker III 8/19, Wentz 2/18, Sermon 4/4, Hunt 2/2
 CHI: McCaffrey 18/115 TD, Jones 5/23, Ahmed 4/20, Jackson 4/13, Igwebuike 3/6

Receiving

SEA: Lamb 4/65, Dell 3/45, St. Brown 3/10, Renfrow 3/35, Walker III 2/6, Mingo 1/9
 CHI: Jones 5/43, Mooney 3/24, Campbell 3/32, McCaffrey 3/12 2 TDs, Flowers 3/35 TD

Defense

SEA: Baker Int 8-Tk, Collins FF 5-Tk
 CHI: Franklin 2-FF 9-Tk, Whitehead Int 6-Tk

Injuries


SEA:
 CHI: Ward 3

Misc

SEA: McPherson 2/2 FG 51 Lg, Wentz F-L, Lock F-L, Joseph-Day FR
 CHI: Butker 1/1 FG 29 Lg, McCaffrey F-L, Baun FR, Ward FR



16
14



Justin Tucker nailed a 41-yard FG with 0:10 remaining to lift the Cubs to victory over the Bats. The Cubs clawed their way back from an 11-point deficit after **Russell Wilson** came into the game for starter **Derek Carr** and started the rally with a 7-yard TD pass to **Christian Kirk** late in the 3rd quarter. **Justin Herbert** was then intercepted in Cubs' territory, leading to a Cubs FG drive to narrow the gap to 1. The Cubs' defence held firm after a lost fumble by rookie RB, **Roshon Johnson**, setting up a classic Wilson-led 55-yard drive for the winning kick. Herbert threw 2 TD passes in the loss.

10-08-2023 Veteran Field Temp:63 Wind:0-10 None No Line MVP:Wilson HFA:ON(4)

	1	2	3	4	Tot
2023 Iowa City (1-0)	3	0	7	6	16
2023 Billtown (0-1)	7	0	7	0	14

Passing

ICC: Wilson 25/16 194 Yds TD, Carr 13/8 79 Yds 2 Int
 BB: Herbert 48/36 239 Yds 2 TDs Int

Rushing

ICC: Johnson 11/42, Carter 9/29, Wilson 2/12, Miller 5/4
 BB: Spears 5/31, Harris 3/13, Breida 1/5, Beck 1/3, Herbert 2/1

Receiving

ICC: Kirk 5/54 TD, Brown 4/76, Carter 3/17, Moore 3/24, Njoku 3/37, Palmer 3/35
 BB: Jeudy 11/92, Hodgins 7/72, Kincaid 5/24, Breida 3/8, Harris 2/10 TD, Spears 2/-2

Defense

ICC: Johnson 10-Tk, Brents 9-Tk, Jones Int 3-Tk
 BB: Davis 15-Tk, Williams Int 9-Tk, Wise Jr. FF 6-Tk, Wilson Int 4-Tk, McDuffie

Injuries

ICC: Smith 9
 BB: Leonard 13, Fuller 12, Pocic 2

Misc

ICC: Tucker 3/3 FG 41 Lg, R.Johnson F-L
 BB: Surtain II FR



3



32

In heavy rain in Jurassic Park, Swordfish QBs were picked off 5 times and **Cairo Santos** kicked 6 FGs to give Durham an easy victory. A 37-yard TD pass from **Josh Allen** to **Dawson Knox** was the only big scoring play by either offence, giving Durham a 10-0 lead in the 1st quarter. **Kirk Cousins'** bad day started when he was picked off by **Tyrann Mathieu** in the end zone. It continued in the 2nd half with a pick on the opening drive then back-to-back picks to start the 4th quarter, with **Devon Witherspoon** returning one for a TD. QB, **Malik Willis** came in and threw a pick to end the game.

10-08-2023 Jurassic Park Temp:93 Wind:Calm Heavy Rain No Line MVP:Allen HFA:ON(5)

	1	2	3	4	Tot
2023 Sebastian (0-1)	0	3	0	0	3
2023 Durham (1-0)	10	3	6	13	32

Passing

SS: Cousins 45/22 213 Yds 4 Int

DTL: Allen 31/21 273 Yds TD

Rushing

SS: Chubb 14/50, Taylor 2/8

DTL: Tucker 10/27, Allgeier 13/25, Allen 4/11

Receiving

SS: Gallup 5/61, Peoples-Jones 4/54, Jones 4/38, Marshall Jr. 3/28, Schultz 2/14

DTL: Samuel 5/80, Valdes-Scantling 5/72, Tucker 4/31, Knox 2/48 TD, Allgeier 2/8

Defense

SS: Fuller 8-Tk, Hicks 8-Tk

DTL: Pitre Int 7-Tk, Jones Sk 6-Tk, Witherspoon Int(TD) 2-Tk, Mathieu Int 5-Tk

Injuries

SS: Johnson 8

DTL:

Misc

SS: Carlson 1/1 FG 36 Lg

DTL: Santos 6/6 FG 51 Lg



24



10

Jamaal Williams broke through for a 9-yard TD run late in the 3rd quarter to give Cowtown a two-score lead and the defence blanked **Joe Burrow** and the Blue Eagles the rest of the way to earn a grinding road win. Williams rushed for 124 yards on 21 carries as part of a 191-yard team effort that wore down the Scarborough line and gave time for **Jimmy Garoppolo** to find **Allen Lazard** and **Christian Watson** for TD passes of 23 yards and 21 yards. **Dalvin Cook** scored the lone Blue Eagles' TD on a 3-yard run in the 2nd quarter to tie it at 7 at the time. Neither side turned the ball over.

10-07-2023 The Eagles Nest Temp:77 Wind:0-10 None No Line MVP:Williams HFA:ON(1)

	1	2	3	4	Tot
2023 Cowtown (1-0)	0	7	14	3	24
2023 Scarborough (0-1)	0	7	3	0	10

Passing

COW: Garoppolo 19/12 149 Yds 2 TDs

SBE: Burrow 36/24 188 Yds

Rushing

COW: Williams 21/124 TD, Murray 13/66, Garoppolo 5/1

SBE: Cook 14/56 TD, Perine 3/21, Burrow 4/15

Receiving

COW: Lazard 5/77 TD, Watson 2/30 TD, Evans 2/20, Murray 2/13, LaPorta 1/9

SBE: Robinson 6/43, Cook 5/2, Dotson 4/29, Zaccheaus 4/58, Cobb 2/13, Perine 2/8

Defense

COW: Smith 9-Tk

SBE: Bosa Sk 11-Tk, Walker 2-Sks 3-Tk, Speed FF 9-Tk, Fowler Jr. Sk FF 3-Tk

Injuries

COW: Pierce 13

SBE:

Misc

COW: Slye 1/1 FG 30 Lg

SBE: Crosby 1/2 FG 40 Lg



17



40

Aaron Rodgers was intercepted three times, twice by corner **Tariq Woolen**, setting up 17 Pickering points, including a 3rd quarter pick-six by Woolen, to set the stage for a surprisingly easy Spartans victory. While the North Star defence held up well early in the game against the potent Pickering attack, the offence struggled during the same period, allowing the Spartans' lead to balloon to 23-3 early in the 3rd quarter. From then on the teams traded blows but the Stars were unable to close the gap. The Spartans rushed for 193 yards and controlled the ball for over 36 minutes

10-08-2023 Thermopylae Stadium Temp:56 Wind:10-20 None No Line MVP:Woolen HFA:ON(

	1	2	3	4	Tot
2023 Budapest (0-1)	0	3	14	0	17
2023 Pickering (1-0)	6	10	14	10	40

Passing

BUD: Rodgers 24/11 122 Yds TD 3 Int

PIC: Hurts 20/13 173 Yds

Rushing

BUD: Patterson 7/85 TD, Mostert 9/47, Achane 5/23, Perkins 5/11

PIC: Sanders 24/126 2 TDs, Hurts 11/35, White 7/26 TD, Swift 1/6

Receiving

BUD: Jefferson 6/57 TD, Diggs 3/52, Kittle 2/10, Raymond 1/8

PIC: Smith 4/73, Freiermuth 3/45, Brown 2/38, Sanders 1/0, Swift 1/1, Pickens 1/8

Defense

BUD: Jordan FF 10-Tk, Phillips Sk 6-Tk, Luvu FF 5-Tk

PIC: Woolen 2-Int(TD) 2-Tk, Clowney Sk 8-Tk, Howard Int 3-Tk

Injuries

BUD: Fitzpatrick 1, Dean 1

PIC: Dugger 1

Misc

BUD: Folk 1/1 FG 21 Lg, Patterson F-L

PIC: Zuerlein 4/4 FG 50 Lg, Carter II FR



36



14

The game started shakily for York as **Isaiah Simmons** picked off **Tom Brady** on the game's opening drive and ran it back 35 yards for a TD. But the defensive score would be the Hawks' only offence until late in the 4th as the Excalibur defence gave **Geno Smith** few places to go with the ball. Offensively, York was led by **Derrick Henry**, who carried the ball 30 times for 102 yards and 2 TDs, coming on 3 and 5-yard runs. The Swords piled up 29 points in the 1st half, seizing on a **Bijan Robinson** fumble and good field position due to Brooklin's offensive struggles, and never looked back.

10-08-2023 Hawkeye Park Temp:63 Wind:0-5 None No Line MVP:Henry HFA:ON(2)

	1	2	3	4	Tot
2023 York (1-0)	16	13	0	7	36
2023 Brooklin (0-1)	7	0	0	7	14

Passing

YOR: Brady 41/24 282 Yds TD Int

BRH: Smith 28/15 105 Yds

Rushing

YOR: Henry 30/102 2 TDs, Scott 2/15, Burton 1/1

BRH: Robinson 19/144, Ekeler 6/26 TD

Receiving

YOR: Kmet 5/45, St. Brown 5/40, Davis 4/46, Burks 4/83, Williams 3/49 TD, Henry 2/8

BRH: London 5/65, Ekeler 5/11, Ingram 1/13, Hyatt 1/3, Hesse 1/3, Hollins 1/13

Defense

YOR: Rousseau Sk 3-Tk

BRH: Simmons Int(TD) 8-Tk, Curl 8-Tk, Tranquill FF 5-Tk

Injuries

YOR: Mathis 14, Zuniga 13, Ojulari 9

BRH: Al-Shaair 4

Misc

YOR: Gould 3/4 FG 41 Lg, Apple FR

BRH: Bullock 0/1 FG, Robinson F-L



38



23

Tua Tagovailoa fired a ball into the flat that **Josh Jacobs** ran home 12 yards for a TD to spark a 21-point 2nd half run for the Glads. After falling behind 20-17 in a back-and-forth 1st half that saw long drives and interceptions by both QBs lead to points for the opponent, Georgia stiffened defensively and allowed just 3 points in the 2nd half, while still moving the ball offensively. Tua threw 5 TD passes, 3 of those to **Diontae Johnson** and was not sacked by the feared Erieau pass rush. **Dameon Pierce** and **Najee Harris** scored on runs of 15 and 9 yards respectively to find the end zone for the Caddies.

10-08-2023 Kelly-Burke Field Temp:68 Wind:10-20 None No Line MVP:Tagovailoa HFA:ON(4)

	1	2	3	4	Tot
2023 Georgia (1-0)	7	10	14	7	38
2023 Erieau (0-1)	7	13	0	3	23

Passing

GEO: Tagovailoa 27/21 250 Yds 5 TDs Int
 ERI: Murray 27/18 162 Yds Int

Rushing

GEO: Jacobs 20/74, Tagovailoa 4/36, Stevenson 10/29
 ERI: Pierce 10/58 TD, Murray 6/49, Harris 8/46 TD

Receiving

GEO: Stevenson 5/33, Cooper 5/77 TD, Johnson 4/71 3 TDs, Jacobs 4/40 TD, Ertz 2/19
 ERI: Andrews 5/50, Waddle 4/58, Higgins 2/13, Harris 2/6, Hines 2/10, Pierce 2/14

Defense

GEO: Nichols Sk 6-Tk, Bell Int 6-Tk
 ERI: Crosby FF 7-Tk, Hamilton 8-Tk

Injuries

GEO:
 ERI: Bosa 11

Misc

GEO: Bass 1/1 FG 51 Lg
 ERI: Myers 3/3 FG 40 Lg



10

31

The Irish controlled the pace early, with two long drives resulting in a FG and an 11-yard TD pass from **Jacoby Brissett** to **Zach Charbonnet** to give them a 10-7 lead late in the 2nd. Building on a 62-yard TD bomb to **Davante Adams** earlier, **Matt Ryan** used the pass to set up a 7-yard TD run by **Joe Mixon** to take the lead 14-10 with 0:46 remaining then got the ball back when the Irish turned the ball over on downs at the 50, leading to a 43-yard FG for a 17-10 halftime lead. The 2nd half saw the Irish offence shut down, while the Braves added 2 TDs, including a 10-yard run by rookie **Jahmyr Gibbs**.

10-08-2023 St. Charles Stadium Temp:72 Wind:Calm No Line MVP:Ryan HFA:ON(

	1	2	3	4	Tot
2023 East Elmhurst (0-1)	3	7	0	0	10
2023 LaPlata (1-0)	0	17	7	7	31

Passing

EE: Brissett 30/17 122 Yds TD
 LPB: Ryan 30/21 336 Yds 2 TDs

Rushing

EE: Brissett 9/47, Huntley 11/43, Charbonnet 10/36, Knight 6/8
 LPB: Mixon 14/37 TD, Gibbs 7/22 TD

Receiving

EE: Metcalf 6/75, Charbonnet 6/17 TD, Jones 3/18, Granson 1/8, Skowronek 1/4
 LPB: Thielen 6/44 TD, Adams 6/180 TD, Goedert 5/69, Gibbs 3/36, Mixon 1/7

Defense

EE: Epps 8-Tk
 LPB: Kendrick 9-Tk, Thompson 9-Tk, Reddick FF 5-Tk

Injuries

EE:
 LPB:

Misc

EE: Pineiro 1/2 FG 24 Lg
 LPB: Joseph 1/1 FG 43 Lg



WEEK ONE

STANDINGS & STATS

2023 EFL - Week 1 Standings

East	W	L	T	Pct	Stk	Pts	Ave	Opp	Ave	Diff	Home	Div	Conf
Buffalo	1	0	0	1.000	W1	31	31.0	10	10.0	21.0	1 0 0	1 0 0	1 0 0
Bruxelles	1	0	0	1.000	W1	20	20.0	3	3.0	17.0	0 0 0	1 0 0	1 0 0
New Jersey	0	1	0	.000	L1	3	3.0	20	20.0	-17.0	0 1 0	0 1 0	0 1 0
Cobb County	0	1	0	.000	L1	10	10.0	31	31.0	-21.0	0 0 0	0 1 0	0 1 0
Central	W	L	T	Pct	Stk	Pts	Ave	Opp	Ave	Diff	Home	Div	Conf
Viriden	1	0	0	1.000	W1	35	35.0	27	27.0	8.0	1 0 0	1 0 0	1 0 0
Peg City	1	0	0	1.000	W1	26	26.0	20	20.0	6.0	0 0 0	1 0 0	1 0 0
Charleswood	0	1	0	.000	L1	20	20.0	26	26.0	-6.0	0 1 0	0 1 0	0 1 0
Twin Cities	0	1	0	.000	L1	27	27.0	35	35.0	-8.0	0 0 0	0 1 0	0 1 0
West	W	L	T	Pct	Stk	Pts	Ave	Opp	Ave	Diff	Home	Div	Conf
Chino	1	0	0	1.000	W1	31	31.0	6	6.0	25.0	1 0 0	1 0 0	1 0 0
Iowa City	1	0	0	1.000	W1	16	16.0	14	14.0	2.0	0 0 0	1 0 0	1 0 0
Billtown	0	1	0	.000	L1	14	14.0	16	16.0	-2.0	0 1 0	0 1 0	0 1 0
Seattle	0	1	0	.000	L1	6	6.0	31	31.0	-25.0	0 0 0	0 1 0	0 1 0
North	W	L	T	Pct	Stk	Pts	Ave	Opp	Ave	Diff	Home	Div	Conf
Durham	1	0	0	1.000	W1	32	32.0	3	3.0	29.0	1 0 0	1 0 0	1 0 0
Cowtown	1	0	0	1.000	W1	24	24.0	10	10.0	14.0	0 0 0	1 0 0	1 0 0
Scarborough	0	1	0	.000	L1	10	10.0	24	24.0	-14.0	0 1 0	0 1 0	0 1 0
Sebastian	0	1	0	.000	L1	3	3.0	32	32.0	-29.0	0 0 0	0 1 0	0 1 0
Coastal	W	L	T	Pct	Stk	Pts	Ave	Opp	Ave	Diff	Home	Div	Conf
York	1	0	0	1.000	W1	36	36.0	14	14.0	22.0	0 0 0	1 0 0	1 0 0
Pickering	1	0	0	1.000	W1	40	40.0	17	17.0	23.0	1 0 0	1 0 0	1 0 0
Brooklin	0	1	0	.000	L1	14	14.0	36	36.0	-22.0	0 1 0	0 1 0	0 1 0
Budapest	0	1	0	.000	L1	17	17.0	40	40.0	-23.0	0 0 0	0 1 0	0 1 0
South	W	L	T	Pct	Stk	Pts	Ave	Opp	Ave	Diff	Home	Div	Conf
LaPlata	1	0	0	1.000	W1	31	31.0	10	10.0	21.0	1 0 0	1 0 0	1 0 0
Georgia	1	0	0	1.000	W1	38	38.0	23	23.0	15.0	0 0 0	1 0 0	1 0 0
Erieau	0	1	0	.000	L1	23	23.0	38	38.0	-15.0	0 1 0	0 1 0	0 1 0
East Elmhurst	0	1	0	.000	L1	10	10.0	31	31.0	-21.0	0 0 0	0 1 0	0 1 0

Passing		G	Att	Cmp	%	Yds	Y/C	Lg	25	50	In	I%	Td	Td%	Sk	Rate
1 Tannehill	PCC	1	22	16	72.7	201	12.6	40	1	0	0	0.0	3	13.6	3	140.3
2 Tagovailoa	GEO	1	27	21	77.8	250	11.9	24	0	0	1	3.7	5	18.5	0	129.4
3 Ryan	LPB	1	30	21	70.0	336	16.0	62	4	0	0	0.0	2	6.7	0	129.3
4 Garoppolo	COW	1	19	12	63.2	149	12.4	23	0	0	0	0.0	2	10.5	4	122.5
5 Goff	CHI	1	27	20	74.1	169	8.5	21	0	0	1	3.7	3	11.1	0	111.5
6 Jackson	BUF	1	34	25	73.5	209	8.4	17	0	0	0	0.0	2	5.9	3	108.6
7 Allen	DTL	1	31	21	67.7	273	13.0	37	2	0	0	0.0	1	3.2	0	106.0
8 Mahomes	VV	1	29	19	65.5	273	14.4	38	2	0	1	3.4	2	6.9	0	104.5
9 Lawrence	TCT	1	36	26	72.2	281	10.8	31	3	0	0	0.0	1	2.8	3	104.1
10 Fields	BRX	1	20	13	65.0	146	11.2	26	1	0	0	0.0	1	5.0	1	103.3
11 Wilson	ICC	1	25	16	64.0	194	12.1	28	1	0	0	0.0	1	4.0	0	101.1
12 Hurts	PIC	1	20	13	65.0	173	13.3	30	1	0	0	0.0	0	0.0	2	92.3
13 Herbert	BB	1	48	36	75.0	239	6.6	23	0	0	1	2.1	2	4.2	0	90.5
14 Burrow	SBE	1	36	24	66.7	188	7.8	47	2	0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	79.4
15 Brady	YOR	1	41	24	58.5	282	11.8	56	2	0	1	2.4	1	2.4	0	77.5
16 Brissett	EE	1	30	17	56.7	122	7.2	24	0	0	0	0.0	1	3.3	2	77.4
17 Jones	NJ	1	35	21	60.0	158	7.5	40	1	0	0	0.0	0	0.0	5	70.9
18 Murray	ERI	1	27	18	66.7	162	9.0	24	0	0	1	3.7	0	0.0	1	67.2
19 Smith	BRH	1	28	15	53.6	105	7.0	23	0	0	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	62.4
20 Pickett	CHP	1	29	16	55.2	191	11.9	25	1	0	2	6.9	1	3.4	4	58.3
21 Young	CB	1	30	17	56.7	176	10.4	24	0	0	2	6.7	1	3.3	2	57.1
22 Wentz	SEA	1	20	13	65.0	160	12.3	29	2	0	2	10.0	0	0.0	0	50.0
23 Rodgers	BUD	1	24	11	45.8	122	11.1	46	1	0	3	12.5	1	4.2	1	35.8
24 Cousins	SS	1	45	22	48.9	213	9.7	22	0	0	4	8.9	0	0.0	3	25.5

Kick Returns		G	No	Yds	Avg	Lg	Td	Punt Returns		G	No	FC	Yds	Avg	Lg	Td
1 Patterson	BUD	1	3	88	29.3	34	0	1 Covey	YOR	1	7	1	162	23.1	86	1
2 Powell	PCC	1	4	67	16.8	29	0	2 Turpin	BRX	1	4	2	117	29.3	52	0
3 Haskins	SBE	1	2	56	28.0	29	0	3 Raymond	BUD	1	1	0	63	63.0	63	0
4 Williams	SS	1	2	52	26.0	27	0	4 Smith	CHI	1	4	0	43	10.8	16	0
5 Nixon	BRX	1	1	36	36.0	36	0	5 Carter	COW	1	3	0	32	10.7	14	0
6 Agnew	GEO	1	2	33	16.5	19	0	6 Jones	ICC	1	3	2	30	10.0	11	0
7 Jackson	CHI	1	1	32	32.0	32	0	7 Woods	BUF	1	4	0	28	7.0	8	0
8 Hines	ERI	1	1	28	28.0	28	0	8 McCloud	PCC	1	2	0	28	14.0	15	0
9 Jones	ICC	1	1	26	26.0	26	0	9 Taylor	NJ	1	2	0	26	13.0	17	0
10 Carter	COW	1	1	22	22.0	22	0	10 Dell	SEA	1	2	0	23	11.5	14	0
11 Bolden	ERI	1	1	22	22.0	22	0	11 Rodgers	EE	1	2	1	22	11.0	11	0
12 Williams	BUF	1	1	22	22.0	22	0	12 Williams	SS	1	1	0	19	19.0	19	0
13 Washington	CB	1	1	13	13.0	13	0	13 Washington	CB	1	2	0	19	9.5	11	0
14 Scott	DTL	1	1	12	12.0	12	0	14 Agnew	GEO	1	2	1	18	9.0	10	0
15 Saubert	ERI	1	1	5	5.0	5	0	15 Holland	CHP	1	2	0	16	8.0	10	0
								16 Washington	BRH	1	2	1	14	7.0	8	0
								17 Reed	SBE	1	3	1	13	4.3	9	0
								18 Duvernay	TCT	1	1	0	10	10.0	10	0
								19 Hines	ERI	1	1	1	4	4.0	4	0

		G	Att	Yds	Avg	Gain	10	25	50	FD	Lg	Td	Att/G	Yds/G
Rushing														
1 Robinson	BRH	1	19	144	7.6	89.5	2	0	0	6	53	0	19.0	144.0
2 Sanders	PIC	1	24	126	5.3	87.5	5	0	0	7	17	2	24.0	126.0
3 Williams	COW	1	21	124	5.9	95.2	3	0	0	7	34	1	21.0	124.0
4 McCaffrey	CHI	1	18	115	6.4	88.9	2	0	0	6	46	1	18.0	115.0
5 Henry	YOR	1	30	102	3.4	73.3	1	0	0	7	17	2	30.0	102.0
6 Patterson	BUD	1	7	85	12.1	85.7	2	0	0	3	39	1	7.0	85.0
7 Jacobs	GEO	1	20	74	3.7	80.0	2	0	0	5	17	0	20.0	74.0
8 Hall	TCT	1	16	72	4.5	75.0	4	0	0	6	12	1	16.0	72.0
9 Conner	WV	1	14	68	4.9	85.7	2	0	0	6	20	2	14.0	68.0
10 Dillon	BUF	1	15	67	4.5	86.7	2	0	0	5	16	1	15.0	67.0
11 Mahomes	WV	1	5	66	13.2	100.0	4	0	0	3	20	0	5.0	66.0
12 Murray	COW	1	13	66	5.1	84.6	2	0	0	4	21	0	13.0	66.0
13 Pierce	ERI	1	10	58	5.8	100.0	2	0	0	4	15	1	10.0	58.0
14 Cook	SBE	1	14	56	4.0	85.7	1	0	0	4	26	1	14.0	56.0
15 Pickett	CHP	1	6	53	8.8	100.0	2	0	0	4	21	1	6.0	53.0
16 Chubb	SS	1	14	50	3.6	78.6	1	0	0	2	14	0	14.0	50.0
17 Murray	ERI	1	6	49	8.2	100.0	1	0	0	3	28	0	6.0	49.0
18 Dobbins	CHP	1	14	49	3.5	78.6	1	0	0	2	13	0	14.0	49.0
19 Wilson	TCT	1	9	48	5.3	77.8	2	0	0	2	13	0	9.0	48.0
20 Fournette	BRX	1	12	48	4.0	100.0	0	0	0	2	9	0	12.0	48.0
21 Mostert	BUD	1	9	47	5.2	88.9	1	0	0	2	14	0	9.0	47.0
22 Etienne	CB	1	12	47	3.9	83.3	1	0	0	2	16	0	12.0	47.0
23 Brissett	EE	1	9	47	5.2	88.9	2	0	0	3	13	0	9.0	47.0
24 Harris	ERI	1	8	46	5.8	100.0	1	0	0	2	14	1	8.0	46.0
25 Huntley	EE	1	11	43	3.9	81.8	1	0	0	3	15	0	11.0	43.0
26 Jackson	BUF	1	12	42	3.5	83.3	1	0	0	2	11	0	12.0	42.0
27 Johnson	ICC	1	11	42	3.8	90.9	2	0	0	3	13	0	11.0	42.0
28 Foreman	BRX	1	13	41	3.2	76.9	0	0	0	3	8	0	13.0	41.0
29 Johnson	BUF	1	9	41	4.6	88.9	1	0	0	1	20	0	9.0	41.0
30 Mixon	LPB	1	14	37	2.6	71.4	0	0	0	1	7	1	14.0	37.0
31 Charbonnet	EE	1	10	36	3.6	80.0	1	0	0	2	10	0	10.0	36.0
32 Tagovailoa	GEO	1	4	36	9.0	75.0	3	0	0	2	17	0	4.0	36.0
33 Hurts	PIC	1	11	35	3.2	72.7	2	0	0	4	11	0	11.0	35.0
34 Montgomery	NJ	1	8	34	4.3	75.0	1	0	0	2	10	0	8.0	34.0
35 Spears	BB	1	5	31	6.2	100.0	1	0	0	3	16	0	5.0	31.0
36 Carter	ICC	1	9	29	3.2	100.0	0	0	0	0	6	0	9.0	29.0
37 Stevenson	GEO	1	10	29	2.9	70.0	0	0	0	2	9	0	10.0	29.0
38 Kamara	PCC	1	8	27	3.4	75.0	1	0	0	1	16	0	8.0	27.0
39 Tucker	DTL	1	10	27	2.7	70.0	1	0	0	1	10	0	10.0	27.0
40 Herbert	BRX	1	4	27	6.8	75.0	1	0	0	2	14	1	4.0	27.0

Receiving		G	No	Dp	Att	Rac	Yds	Avg	25	50	FD	Lg	Td	Rec/G	Yds/G
1 Jeudy	BB	1	11	0	11	23	92	8.4	0	0	7	15	0	11.0	92.0
2 Moore	TCT	1	9	0	12	22	108	12.0	1	0	8	28	1	9.0	108.0
3 Kelce	CHP	1	8	0	9	29	94	11.8	0	0	7	18	0	8.0	94.0
4 Gage	BUF	1	8	1	13	12	71	8.9	0	0	7	17	2	8.0	71.0
5 Hill	VV	1	8	0	14	11	159	19.9	2	0	7	38	0	8.0	159.0
6 Woods	BUF	1	7	1	8	10	65	9.3	0	0	3	17	0	7.0	65.0
7 Hodgins	BB	1	7	0	8	11	72	10.3	0	0	2	23	0	7.0	72.0
8 Godwin	BRX	1	6	0	7	8	66	11.0	0	0	4	16	0	6.0	66.0
9 Robinson	SBE	1	6	0	6	11	43	7.2	0	0	2	17	0	6.0	43.0
10 Charbonnet	EE	1	6	0	9	34	17	2.8	0	0	1	11	1	6.0	17.0
11 Thielen	LPB	1	6	0	7	3	44	7.3	0	0	3	10	1	6.0	44.0
12 Chase	VV	1	6	1	9	23	80	13.3	0	0	6	24	1	6.0	80.0
13 Metcalf	EE	1	6	1	9	6	75	12.5	0	0	3	24	0	6.0	75.0
14 Adams	LPB	1	6	0	9	26	180	30.0	3	0	4	62	1	6.0	180.0
15 Jefferson	BUD	1	6	1	12	3	57	9.5	0	0	3	20	1	6.0	57.0
16 Stevenson	GEO	1	5	0	5	53	33	6.6	0	0	1	9	0	5.0	33.0
17 Kincaid	BB	1	5	0	5	2	24	4.8	0	0	0	7	0	5.0	24.0
18 Cooper	GEO	1	5	1	7	5	77	15.4	0	0	5	22	1	5.0	77.0
19 Kamara	PCC	1	5	1	7	36	33	6.6	0	0	2	10	1	5.0	33.0
20 Jones	CHI	1	5	0	5	69	43	8.6	0	0	4	14	0	5.0	43.0
21 Samuel	NJ	1	5	0	5	34	72	14.4	1	0	4	40	0	5.0	72.0
22 London	BRH	1	5	0	9	2	65	13.0	0	0	3	23	0	5.0	65.0
23 Kmet	YOR	1	5	0	11	6	45	9.0	0	0	2	14	0	5.0	45.0
24 Andrews	ERI	1	5	0	6	21	50	10.0	0	0	2	24	0	5.0	50.0
25 St. Brown	YOR	1	5	0	8	4	40	8.0	0	0	2	9	0	5.0	40.0
26 Kirk	ICC	1	5	1	9	7	54	10.8	0	0	4	17	1	5.0	54.0
27 Cook	SBE	1	5	1	7	20	2	0.4	0	0	0	5	0	5.0	2.0
28 Allen	NJ	1	5	0	8	3	18	3.6	0	0	3	11	0	5.0	18.0
29 Ekeler	BRH	1	5	0	7	34	11	2.2	0	0	0	5	0	5.0	11.0
30 Samuel	DTL	1	5	0	7	16	80	16.0	1	0	5	25	0	5.0	80.0
31 Pittman Jr.	CB	1	5	0	10	14	72	14.4	0	0	4	24	0	5.0	72.0
32 Gallup	SS	1	5	0	9	14	61	12.2	0	0	3	19	0	5.0	61.0
33 Lazard	COW	1	5	0	7	31	77	15.4	0	0	5	23	1	5.0	77.0
34 Goedert	LPB	1	5	1	8	30	69	13.8	1	0	4	31	0	5.0	69.0
35 Valdes-Scantlin	DTL	1	5	2	7	5	72	14.4	0	0	3	19	0	5.0	72.0
36 Hopkins	BRX	1	4	1	7	20	52	13.0	1	0	3	26	1	4.0	52.0
37 Strong Jr.	CB	1	4	0	4	14	13	3.3	0	0	0	5	0	4.0	13.0
38 Jacobs	GEO	1	4	0	5	50	40	10.0	0	0	2	13	1	4.0	40.0
39 Waddle	ERI	1	4	1	7	9	58	14.5	0	0	3	21	0	4.0	58.0
40 McKinnon	NJ	1	4	0	4	20	15	3.8	0	0	0	6	0	4.0	15.0



AROUND THE



With Spats McChad

NEW YORK – I am looking forward to the start of Week Four.

“Why Week Four, Spats?” you ask in unison.

Week Four, because that’s approximately how many weeks it will take before fans, sports analysts, and bookmakers can expect to be treated to top grade professional calibre football that can be reasonably analyzed pre-game, in-game and post-game. The shortened pre-season, due to the longer schedule, and the fear gripping head coaches that their best players will get injured in “meaningless” games, has contributed to a non-sensical and largely useless pre-season schedule.

Take, for example, Budapest. It was probably not helpful that quarterback *Aaron Rodgers* elected to spend a month of the summer sitting at the bottom of an ancient well in the Carpathian Mountains, living on smart water, porridge, sauerkraut and dried hunter’s sausage. This was, according to Rodgers himself, a meditative technique described to him by an elderly Hungarian mountain-dwelling shaman.

Effectively imprisoned in the well, but able to “see the light,” he would apply mental discipline in a sensory deprived environment to visualize and manifest escaping the well with his astral body and interacting with nearby surface people to effectuate his rescue from the well. The experiment lasted 30 days at which point members of a local fire department, at the direction of authorities, lifted an emaciated and bearded Rodgers from the bottom of the well and he was taken to a hospital in Miskolc for physical and psychiatric observation.

This episode kept Rodgers from participating in OTA’s and arranging for throwing sessions with his receivers.

“If Stefon, Justin, George and I aren’t on the same page already, we never will be,” Rodgers snapped when asked about it.

However, as that distraction faded and training camp transitioned to the pre-season games, North Stars’ coach, **Darrin Jones** probably took one look at his quarterback room, saw *CJ Beathard* and somebody he didn’t recognize named *Bryce Perkins* there at the table, and decided that Rodgers was too important to be allowed to play in the pre-season. So, the veteran QB who had spent late July and August rehabbing from his experience in the well, only saw the field during intra-team drills, without hitting and pads, and did not take a single snap in the pre-season games, to avoid an injury that could compromise the entire season.

We’ll see how “well” this worked out in Week One at Pickering when I get to that game...

Rodgers was by no means the exceptional case – although he was the only quarterback to voluntarily sit at the bottom of a well for 30 days. Also on the list of quarterbacks “too valuable to play” were: *Kirk Cousins* of Sebastian, *Kenny Pickett* of Charleswood, *Joe Burrow* of Scarborough, *Kyler Murray* of Erieau and *Patrick Mahomes* of Virden. None of these guys played more than one series in the pre-season (why bother then?) and only one of them – the “God King” Mahomes – came out with a win, although Mahomes did throw an interception on Virden’s first possession that he later described as “shaking off the rust.” The rest of this motley crew led their teams to defeat and looked awful doing it.

It wasn’t just the quarterbacks. There were plenty of top-grade wide receivers, running backs, edge rushers and highly tuned defensive backs with hamstrings itching to pop who did not see much of the field in pre-season games. *Mike Evans* of Cowtown reportedly paid *Quintez Cephus* to wear his number and run routes for him during pre-season while he relaxed in the sauna and drank beer. Cephus was later released by the Corn Kings for his part in the fraud. As for Evans, who the Corn Kings would be suicidal to release, he played and caught just two passes in Week One and could not shake Blue Eagles’ corner, *Michael Davis*. Other players kept off the field by their coaches, such as *Amon-Ra St. Brown* of York, *Brandin Cooks* of Cobb County, *Terry McLaurin* of New Jersey, *Saquon Barkley* of Peg City and *Jonathan Taylor* of Sebastian are just a few of the big names who looked rusty or who were unable to stay on the field in Week One due to fatigue.

In general, the Week One slate was sloppily played, with few exceptions. Few of the teams looked cohesive or dialed in. One of those teams that did look dialed in was the same team that enthusiastically put on full pads in July and threw all their players into the pre-season action. The Pickering Spartans could smell a championship back during OTAs and, to a man, couldn’t wait to get the season started, throwing all that pent up energy at a familiar and dangerous foe....

BOOBAPEST

By late August, **Gus Konstantakos** had already spent many sleepless nights going over game film and perfecting his game plan for what he knew would be an important Week One game against the only true competition he would face in the Coastal Division: Budapest. He could not have been readier, his team could not have been readier and, it would appear, his competition could not have

more *unready* for the big opening day moment.

The Budapest coach, **Darrin Jones** was, of course, ready as he always is, with a game plan that on the chalkboard made sense and would have challenged the Spartans to be on their toes and adjust. Who knows what might have happened in this contest had that game plan been executed to even a basic level of competency. Not that it wasn't entirely executed. The defence was ready, bending but not breaking throughout a first half that saw Pickering possess the ball for more than 20 minutes, yet come away with just 16 points. When measured next to other factors that came into play, that number of points was a remarkable achievement against an offence like that of the Spartans. No, the inability to execute was the fault of one very important individual...**Aaron Rodgers!**

The on-field leader of the North Stars really did play like he had recently emerged from 30 days at the bottom of an abandoned well and had not practiced a meaningful down since. There is little other way to explain what turned out to be the second worst statistical performance by a quarterback in Week One. Only **Kirk Cousins** did a worse job trying to jumpstart his team in the opening week. Rodgers' line was a Brodie Croyle-like 11 of 24 for 122 yards, 1 TD and 3 INTs, making for a passer rating of 35.8. The crazy part is that watching the game, Rodgers didn't even look that good.

The 40-17 final score in favour of Pickering masks the reality that this game was up for grabs – until it wasn't. The Spartans' offence flexed its muscles early, Coach Konstantakos' confidence in **Jalen Hurts** apparent with seven consecutive pass plays on the opening drive, including a 30-yard connection to **DeVonta Smith** that vaulted them into field goal range. This completion and the pair of double-digit scrambles by Hurts got Thermopylae Stadium abuzz, but in the end, it was largely eye candy and they had to settle for a field goal after the Budapest defence hardened.

Another long pass on their next possession, this time to **Marquise Brown** for 24 yards, lifted the crowd again, only to be followed by a lame three plays and a punt. On their third series, Old Gus resorted to his tried-and-true *run-the-same-running-back-between-the-tackles-until-he-coughs-up-blood* strategy, handing the ball to **Miles Sanders** five consecutive times then bootlegging with Hurts. This had the desired effect until it was time to go deep. The Budapest defence wasn't fooled, and **DJ Wonnun** sacked Hurts for a 6-yard loss, forcing a 50-yard field goal.

The Pickering offence's side of this story through the first half was one that, if told in isolation, suggests they were in a dogfight. But an examination of the Budapest offence's side of this story reveals the reason it wasn't, despite it being only 16-3 for the Spartans at half time. The North Stars went three-and-out on their first possession then followed that up with back-to-back interceptions on their ensuing two possessions. The second of these picks, by budding star, **Tariq Woolen**, was returned 31 yards to the Budapest 2-yard line. From there it took two plays to punch it into the end zone for the only touchdown of the first half. If it had not been for a 63-yard punt return by **Kalif Raymond** that set up an easy field goal, it is likely the North Stars would have been shutout in the first half.

Budapest got the ball to start the second half. Any hope for a turnaround that had built up in the fanbase during the 15-minute interval, was soon dashed when Rodgers threw an out pass toward **Stefon Diggs**. Looking at the tape, the only explanation I can think of for Rodgers throwing this ball is that he expected Diggs to make a play, as he usually does. The problem was that the corner Woolen was right on top of Diggs with his head turned toward the quarterback. Woolen got a hand on it, wrestled it away from Diggs, who fell backwards, and ran it back 45 yards for a touchdown. Thermopylae Stadium erupted. Woolen celebrated. The feeling that the game was already all but over was palpable.

The pick-six and **Darrin Jones** calling five straight run plays on the Stars' ensuing possession seemed to jar Rodgers out of his self-induced stupor. He looked more like himself on their final series of the third quarter, completing four straight passes and finding **Justin Jefferson** in the end zone for a touchdown that made it 30-17 for Pickering. Although theoretically still in the game, down by two scores with a quarter remaining, at that point the Budapest defence had been on the field a lot. The Spartans turned to grinding out the clock and there was little the gassed North Star 'D' could do to stop it. A **Greg Zuerlein** field goal and a **Rachaad White** 5-yard TD run, the latter set up after Cordarrell Patterson lost a fumble that was returned to the Budapest 8, was enough to get the proud Budapest coach to wave the white towel with still over 6 minutes remaining.

"Put in that guy," Jones was recorded saying as he pointed to back-up quarterback, **Bryce Perkins** on the sideline holding a clipboard.

"You mean Bryce?" one of his assistants asked to clarify.

"Yeah, whoever that guy is with the clipboard," Jones said irritably, and then leveled a steely glare at Rodgers as he walked off the field. His quarterback had let him down.

The Budapest back-ups sucked up the remainder of the clock, with Perkins running the ball more than he passed it. It was total surrender, a gesture that prompted mockery from the '300 Spartans' fan club in Section 300, and derisive snorts from an aroused **Gus Konstantakos**.

"I see the North Stars are *suuurrennderrriinnng!*" he roared with great self-satisfaction as he addressed the bench, drawing out the word 'surrendering' to let it sink in with his players. "The Spartans *NEVER SURRENDER!* That is the difference between us and them! They are puffy cowards whose will collapses when faced with true Spartan spirit! We have... You have... the spirit of Sparta inside you now! There is nothing you cannot achieve as long as you *NEVER SUURREENNDDEEERRR!!*"

In the final analysis, it was a nearly perfect game for the Spartans. They held the ball for over 36 minutes, netted 354 yards of offence, with 193 of that on the ground, moved the chains a whopping 24 times, held the North Stars to under 300 yards and forced four



Budapest QB, **Aaron Rodgers** is tended to by emergency personnel in Hungary as they rescue him from the bottom of an ancient well in the Carpathian Mountains. Rodgers claims he was engaging in a traditional form of Hungarian Shamanistic meditation.

turnovers, three of those interceptions of a future Hall-of-Fame quarterback. The fullness of the victory only served to feed a coach re-awakened after so many lean years and ravenous again for glory.

“Tis a momentous day, Citizens of Sparta!” **Gus Konstantakos** pompously began as he addressed the media after the game. “Let no man be silent who would praise the valor of these men in blue today who shattered the chariots of the Hun against the shield of victory! Victory most absolute is ours! The enemy is crushed, and his generals humbled before Aries! So, let us taste the sweet wine, but not drink it. For we have battles yet to fight! Cities to conquer! Souls to crush! *NEEVEERR SSUURRENDDERR!*”

The Pickering coach did not take questions. He turned that task over to an assistant. He would have been unable to offer a coherent response in any case, so imbibed he was with the intoxicating spirit of his team’s big win.

In the visitor’s conference room, a peevish **Darrin Jones** attempted to field questions about his quarterback without throwing him under the bus, which he clearly wanted to. When asked about whether Rodgers’ off-season routine was a distraction to the team, Jones tiptoed unconvincingly around the issue:

“Aaron won us two championships and came close to a third,” he responded quietly. “Everyone has their own way of getting ready for the season. This is a tough league – as we saw today, you cannot go into a stadium like this, against a team like this, without your wits about you. Some guys like to practice in the off-season, not wanting to let go of that edge. Others want to clear their heads from football. Others, like Aaron, want to sit at the bottom of a well for a month. Who am I to judge? All that matters is that you’re ready to go on game day. I thought we were ready. But obviously they were more ready we were. We’ll come back from this. It is a long season.”

That is true. And I have no doubt that the North Stars will rebound from this. But this was a big game early in the season – and the memory of it will not fade until they meet again in Week 17.

AROUND THE EFL

To continue a trend that I was forced to adopt in the playoffs last year, I offer you a shortened version of my take on this week’s action. Apparently, most of you do not have the attention to span to read through even this relatively short sentence. That’s fine by me. Week One was a shabby effort overall by most of the franchises due to the factors I mentioned in the lead to this article. Many of the players who did most of the work in the pre-season are now in the CFL, Tex-Mex Football League, signed up for Arena Football., or bagging groceries. I hear that a Grocery Football League may be forming as a result. Looking forward to seeing that...

At **TERRODOME** in Virden, **Patrick Mahomes** recovered from a first series interception to throw for 273 yards and 2 touchdowns in a 35-27 victory over the Triumph. The question of who Mahomes would feed the most of his four elite targets was answered, at least for this week. **Tyreek Hill** finished with 8 catches on 14 targets for 159 yards, but no touchdowns. **T.J. Hockenson** hauled in Mahomes’ first TD pass of the season for his only catch of the afternoon, while **Ja’Marr Chase**, with 6 receptions on the day, caught the other. Making an impression in his first action with the team was **James Conner**, who powered the ball across the goal line twice, from 1 and 3 yards out. **Chris Olave** caught just 2 passes for 20 yards and deep threat **Gabriel Davis** was held off the stat sheet. I only mention all of this in detail to illustrate how deep this Virden roster is and, consequently, how difficult it will be for even a star like Mahomes to keep all these talented players happy. I guess if they win a ring at the end of it all, they’ll all be happy. On the other side, the training wheels are officially off **Trevor Lawrence**, and he showed he could ride. The longest graduated apprenticeship in the history of first overall picks is finally over, allowing us to see an unbridled version of Minneapolis’ Football Messiah. He showed well against a new-and-improved Virden defence, passing for 281 yards and a touchdown and running for another. This Triumph squad looks like it can do damage. **Guy Williams** must be cursing the presence of this Virden team in his division.

In Williamsport, PA, the inaugural game in Veteran Field, home of the Bats, a sellout crowd of 53,476 saw the home team fall to the Cubs, 16-14, on a 41-yard field goal by **Justin Tucker** with seconds remaining. The defending West Division winners looked the part

through the first half and one first series of the second half, intercepting Cubs' starter **Derek Carr** twice and getting two TD passes from **Justin Herbert** to take a 14-3 lead halfway through the third quarter. But the game took a decidedly different turn when an old magician dusted off a few of his old tricks and engineered a comeback to breathe some hope into a young Cubs franchise that won just 3 games last year. **Russell Wilson** didn't run around a mile in circles in the pocket and lob it to a wide-open receiver 50 yards downfield, or scramble for 35 yards through a wide-open middle of the field like he used to. Having put on about 20 extra pounds this off-season, those days are over, it seems. However, he did drop a beauty in to **AJ Brown** for 28 yards then followed that up with a 7-yard bullet to **Christian Kirk** for the Cubs' only touchdown of the game to bring them within one point, trailing 14-13. He finished in classic Wilson fashion by directing a 13-play, 55-yard drive with less than 3 minutes left to put Tucker in position for the win. To be honest, apart from a 17-yard laser to **Josh Palmer** to convert a 3rd & 14 early in the drive, Wilson did not do much on the drive. But the memory of that throw kept the Bats' defenders from keying in on **Roschon Johnson** when it mattered the most on 4th & 2 at the Bats' 43. The rookie broke through for an 11-yard run while the Bats' looked for the pass, paving the way for the eventual game-winning field goal. It was one of the pivotal plays of the game. There is a lot to unpack about this game and these two teams. But it is hardly worth the effort given that the West Division is the sick man of the Pacific. I will just share one point each about these teams: For the Bats, Herbert's days are numbered if coach and GM **Stephen Michael** doesn't get him a running back; for the Cubs, signing and starting Carr then replacing him with **Russell Wilson** before half time opens a Pandora's Box of controversy that **Deron Redding** will be hard-pressed to contain.

At Kelly-Burke Field in Erieau, **Tua Tagovailoa** staked his claim to relevance with a five-touchdown pass performance to lead his Gladiators to a 38-23 win over the Cadillac. Tua connected three times to **Diontae Johnson** and once each to **Amari Cooper** and **Josh Jacobs** for his five aerial majors. Only an interception by **Trevon Diggs** in the final 30 seconds of the first half kept it from being a perfect day for Big Ben's heir. This Week One masterpiece merely confirms what many analysts predicted during training camp and the pre-season: Tua is deadly accurate when given time to throw. But who would have thought he would have time to throw against this Erieau pass rush? It looks like the Cadillac's moment in the sun last year was a fleeting one. The offence shut down after trading blows the Glads in the first half. More concerning, however, is that the likes of **Maxx Crosby**, **Myles Garrett** and **Justin Houston** failed to get home and hardly even bothered Tua in the pocket. Five pressures were recorded on the stat sheet, but apart from Crosby getting a hand on Tua prior to his interception, I'm not sure where the scorekeeper got them from. I am not ready to touch on the issues with **Kyler Murray** this early in the campaign. Suffice to say, I am watching intently, and I do not expect a happy ending to this story.

At Patriot Place in Charleswood, the "visiting" Crusaders muscled through a hard-fought 26-20 win over their intra-city rivals, the Patriots. Newly acquired Peg City quarterback, **Ryan Tannehill** saved the day with 3 touchdown passes to put the Pegs over the top against a very stubborn Pats squad. This game had a surreal quality, as from the start it never felt as if Charleswood could be in the game. Yet, when **Kenny Pickett** rolled out and lofted a strike to **DJ Chark** for an 18-yard touchdown to put the Patriots up 10-9 just before half time, the Pats were definitely in the game – at least on the scoreboard. After 30 minutes this game had all the makings of a developing upset: An overconfident opponent with an accomplished quarterback strutting into the visitors' stadium acting like they owned the place, and a plucky, overly maligned home underdog not yet battered down by a season of frustration, looking at their identical 0-0 records and sensing an opportunity to overturn the pre-ordained verdict of the media. Can you say, "trap game?" It certainly looked that way until the Charleswood "community coach" (whoever he is this year) decided to release the Crusaders from the trap. I am talking about the "Lemmonesque" decision of the Pats to go for it on 4th & 2 at their own 33-yard line on the opening drive of the second half with a 10-9 lead. The Pats sent **Isiah Pacheco**, that frenzied deranged devil of a running back, into the teeth of the Crusader line a fourth straight time and saw him corralled by what looked like the entire Peg City front seven for a 1-yard loss. The Crusaders soon kicked an easy field goal and the spell of a Pats upset was lifted from the field. The post-game rationalization of this patently irrational decision left me gagging at the audacity of even attempting to justify such stupidity. Coaches these days seem incapable of admitting errors. I think they are given a standard list of phrases by their media handlers to use whenever they are cornered for making a bad call. "I felt it gave us the best chance to win" is the most fatuous of the lot.

At Stone Pony Shore in New Jersey, the Bombers tossed an opening day grenade at the Wrecking Balls and came out with a 20-3 victory. It was the first start for **Daniel Jones** in a Wrecking Ball uniform, but it still felt like the ghost of **Matthew Stafford**'s playoff interceptions last year were haunting the field. Jones didn't throw one, but he didn't make many significant plays either and failed to lead his team into the end zone. Take your pick: Sudden traumatic reversal, brought to you by Stafford; or a slow, painful death, brought to you by Jones? This take perhaps does not give enough credit to the Bruxelles defence, which performed better than the sum of its parts due as much to a good game plan as it was to the inadequacy of the Jones-led Wrecking Ball offence. As for **Justin Fields**, he stayed within his comfort zone and didn't force any throws into a defensive alignment he didn't understand. That is progress. The next step will be getting him to understand those defensive alignments. The Bombers ran the ball a ton, 39 carries for 141 yards, just one yard short of their net passing yards of 142. It was no offensive lollapalooza, but it eclipsed the 212 net yards and measly 3 points put on the board by the Wrecking Balls. All-in-all, it was an auspicious start for the Bombers and an ill-omened one for New Jersey. **Jeff Cohen** was quiet after the game, which says a lot about where he thinks his team is going this year.

At Highmark Stadium in Buffalo, the Derailers may have reached their highwater mark of the season on opening day with a 31-10 swat down of the Coyotes. A healthy **Lamar Jackson** took hold of the game late in the second half and didn't let go, after his team fell behind 10-0 to a 53-yard **Jake Moody** field goal and the first touchdown pass of **Bryce Young**'s career, an 8-yarder to fellow rookie, **Luke Musgrove**. Lamar had a hand in 43 of the 56 yards of Buffalo's first scoring drive, finishing it on a 10-yard cross to **Russell Gage** for a touchdown. The second half featured total domination by Buffalo on both sides of the ball. Lamar led the offence to points on each

of their four possessions while the defence bottled up the Cobb County running backs and clogged up the passing lanes to shut out the Coyotes through the final two frames. Jackson passed for 209 yards and 2 touchdowns and rushed for 42 yards. He distributed the ball to seven different receivers and did not turn the ball over. While not the gawdiest stat line Lamar can produce, it was impressive enough against a disciplined and capable Coyote defence that did not deviate from its game plan to shut down the pass and put a spy on the Buffalo quarterback. Every yard was hotly contested and the pace methodical. This game was an unexpected treat for the fans in Buffalo, who showed up in big numbers for opening day mostly due to habit and love of tailgating, rather than any hope of victory. Coyote fans who made the long trip from Georgia or watched from home over 800 miles away on television, became increasingly disconcerted with the play of their no.1 pick as his play regressed in step with Buffalo's rise. Young finished 17 of 30 for 176 yards and a touchdown with 2 interceptions – the stat line of a journeyman career back-up. The Coyotes and their fans came into the season with high hopes, believing that the no.1 pick in the draft would carry them far. My preliminary take after this game is that those hopes are likely unrealistic.

At Hawkeye Park in Brooklin, the Excaliburs reminded football pundits everywhere that they are just one-year, and one badly coached game away from once being the favourites to win the Coastal Division. They slashed and bashed the favoured Hawks, 36-14 in a masterful full spectrum display of the art of football violence. York controlled every phase of the game and used all its weapons to subdue the Hawks and reduce the boisterous sellout crowd in Brooklin to a drunken, discontented rabble chanting for the return of **Derek Carr**. The “old man” **Tom Brady** attempted 41 passes, completing 24 of them for 282 yards and a touchdown. Not bad for a 45-year-old! **Derrick Henry** hauled the pigskin through the heart of the trenches 30 times for 102 yards and 2 touchdowns. The defence, in a true team effort, held the Hawks' offence to 7 points, 269 net yards and just 2 of 13 third down conversions. The special teams even pitched in, with **Britain Covey** returning a punt 86 yards for a touchdown. For Hawks' coach, **Tom Jones**, this was a calamitous start to the **Geno Smith** era in Brooklin. The flashy free agent who had dominated the CFL with the BC Lions, posted a rookie-like stat line, completing 15 of 28 for 105 yards and nothing else. This must improve or the well-respected Jones could find himself out of a job, or worse, hanging from a lamppost in the town square for cutting fan favourite Carr for a journeyman loser. I don't want to see Jones hanging from a lamppost – he's too good of a guy. But if the Geno experiment doesn't work out, he should pay some type of price.

At refurbished and revived St. Charles Stadium in St. Charles, just 7 miles from LaPlata, MD, the rebranded Pink Panthers put on a show for their 'brave' new fanbase, scalping the Irish 31-10. New coach **Stanley Milton**'s game plan on offence was a practical one: Get the ball into the hands of playmakers **Davante Adams** and **Adam Thielen**, but do not neglect the run game. It must have been tough to stick with that plan, as **Joe Mixon** and **Jahmyr Gibbs** had to fight for every yard against an Irish defensive front that refused to yield even as the secondary ran helter-skelter around the yard trying to keep up. Adams finished with 180 yards receiving on 6 catches, including a 62-yard bomb for a TD that gave the Braves their first lead in the second quarter. The Irish, who are openly rebuilding after a disappointing 2022 campaign, hung in for most of the first half, taking a 10-7 lead on an 11-yard TD pass from **Jacoby Brissett** to **Zach Charbonnet** midway in the second quarter. But after the Braves had regained the lead 14-10 on a 7-yard run by Mixon, the Irish rolled the dice at mid-field on 4th & one foot with 0:21 left and did not convert. That set up a neat two-play drive and a 41-yard field goal by **Greg Joseph** as time expired to make it 17-10 LaPlata. It was just enough of a jab in the soft spot to disrupt the fragile psyche of a team that knows in its soul it's a loser. The Irish put in a good effort but were shut out the rest of the way while the Braves tacked on a pair of touchdowns to produce a decisive final score. My take on this game: the Braves look revived in their new locale under their new coach – they could make some noise if **Matt Ryan** holds up. The Irish have fight in them, but not enough punch to lay anybody out. They will have to fight dirty to notch enough victories to place them 21st in the league when the season is over.

At The Eagle's Nest in Toronto, the Corn Kings slowly squeezed the hope out of 32,000 raving Blue Eagles fans that 2023 would be a significant improvement over 2022, walking away with a 24-10 victory. This was a difficult game to watch – not because it was badly played, but because it unfolded at a snail's pace and delivered almost no suspense along the way. There was the odd freak play – like the check down from **Joe Burrow** to an unguarded **Olamide Zaccheaus**, who galloped through a gaping hole in the middle of the defence for a 47-yard gain. It was the longest gaining play of the game, and of that drive, but it led to an anti-climactic field goal. The Corn Kings, seeing that **Nick Bosa** was geared up to make a splash on opening day, elected to run the ball away from him. Run, run, run and run again. Cowtown ran the ball 39 times for 191 yards and 1 touchdown, enough running to buy **Jimmy G** enough time when he needed it to throw a pair of touchdown passes when his team needed them. Bosa was a monster on defence, notching a sack, 11 tackles and 1 tackle for loss, most of that action coming at the opposite end of where he had lined up. The Corn Kings defence made no big plays, but they were disciplined and stuck to their assignments. Burrow's receivers (whose names mostly escape me now) were unable to gain separation. **Dalvin Cook** looked solid but became less and less of a factor as his team fell further behind. This is the problem with the Blue Eagles: For every Burrow, Cook and Bosa, there are two no-names manning starting positions. There is lots of time to prove me wrong, I all I see in Scarborough is more of the same. They had better not trade their first-round pick trying to get better now...

And finally, at Jurassic Park in Durham, the defending Gale Sayers champs gutted the Swordfish 32-3. They were no doubt inspired by Durham team owner, **Céline Dion** singing 1988 Eurovision Song Contest winner, 'Ne Partez Pas Sans Moi' at center field in lieu of the National Anthem. The fans responded to the lyrics, all in French, and the tune, long faded from memory, with bewildered silence, which was taken for reverence for Dion's great talent. That silence did not last long, as deliriously happy fans raucously cheered the humiliation of Sebastian QB, **Kirk Cousins** and the complete neutralization of **Russ Lemmon**'s Fourth Down Offence. Cousins threw 4 picks and Lemmon's fourth down attempts were like spitting into a hurricane in a game totally dominated by Durham. I have lots more to say about the Thunder Lizards but will save it until there is a competitive game to talk about. See ya next week!!

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Jimmy's WEEK TWO PICKS

NEW JERSEY @ TWIN CITIES (line – TRIUMPH by 7)

INJURIES: New Jersey – Arik Armstead (OUT); Twin Cities – Garrett Bradbury (OUT), Emmanuel Moseley (OUT).

Both these teams emerged from Week One with vastly different looking 0-1 records. The Triumph held their own on the road against the powerhouse of the Pacific; while the Wrecking Balls failed to score a touchdown at home against a team going through a defensive rebuild. Daniel Jones, being groomed to eventually replace Matt Stafford, could not have looked much worse. His passing numbers do not reveal the impact of his third down failure rate and the lack of awareness that brought on 5 sacks. As usual, New Jersey struggled to establish an effective run game, although David Montgomery showed some spark when called upon. The Triumph, conversely, looked strong in their loss. Who knows what might have happened had they had more coverage help beside Jaire Alexander to slow down the Virden receivers. These teams are going in opposite directions, and it will show here. **PICK: TWIN CITIES**

BUFFALO @ VIRDEN (line – VIOLATORS by 11)

INJURIES: Buffalo – None; Virden – None.

The Derailers took many by surprise with the completeness of their win over allegedly improved Cobb County last week. Lamar Jackson was the star of the show on a day when both offences looked rough around the edges. That is the strength of Lamar: The ability to improvise when little else is working. While he got away with it against the likely overrated Coyotes, he and his team will not be able to fake their way through 60 minutes on the road at Virden. Some think the Violators' effort could have been better last week, but I don't see how. Take away the Patrick Mahomes pick on the opening drive and the offence took care of business against a well-coached defence. The defence bent a bit but ultimately did not break against an underrated Triumph offence. Few will question that Virden is most likely heading to the no.1 seed when the season is done and means a big overmatch here. **PICK: VIRDEN**

CHARLESWOOD @ BRUXELLES (line – BOMBERS by 8)

INJURIES: Charleswood – Ronald Darby (OUT), Jordan Davis (OUT); Bruxelles – Fabian Moreau (OUT).

I am still not ready to drink the Justin Fields Kool Aid or get behind a Bruxelles rebirth just yet. While they were certainly in control last week against New Jersey, it looked to me to be as much a Wrecking Balls problem as it was a Bombers success. On the other hand, I am also not fooled by the Patriots making a game of it last week against the Crusaders. Their first half success moving the ball in small but precise chunks, using up lots of clock, only served to underline the non-explosiveness of the Kenny Pickett offence. Their coach, fooled by their modest success, dared to go for it on 4th down in their own territory early in the 2nd half. When that failed, it was ball game over, as the Crusaders soon took the lead and Pickett melted down trying to come back. I replay that segment just to underscore that the Pats will be losers again this year due to mediocrity at quarterback and the coaching staff making decisions like that one. The Bombers may not be certified playoff grade in my book, but they don't need to be to cover here. **PICK: BRUXELLES**

PEG CITY @ COBB COUNTY (line – CRUSADERS by 9)

INJURIES: Peg City – None; Cobb County – Jamal Adams (IR), Brandon Jones (OUT), Tre'Davous White (OUT), J.T. Woods (OUT).

Hopes remain high for the Crusaders even after they had to work to put away the punch-less Pats last week. Ryan Tannehill held up his end of the deal that brought him here by throwing for 3 touchdowns and completing 76% of his passes. Saquon Barkley struggled, and Alvin Kamara still isn't all right, so Tannehill demonstrated that he can get the job done when two of his big weapons aren't firing. It was a disappointing start for Cobb County last week, as hopes were high for the team that finished last in the league last year.

I don't know why they are – they just are. Many believe Bryce Young is the answer and he may yet be. But he was not the answer last week and looks like he has lots of adjusting to do to the pro league. Until he figures it out, the Dogs aren't winning. **PICK: PEG CITY**

BILLTOWN @ SEATTLE (line – BATS by 3)

INJURIES: Billtown – Jordan Fuller (OUT), Shaquille Leonard (OUT), Ethan Pocic (OUT); Seattle – None.

The Bats stumbled out of the gate in the race to defend their division title with a loss to the still rebuilding Cubs. One shouldn't blame Justin Herbert for this failure, yet it is hard not to when he had a passing hand in 80% of the Bats' plays from scrimmage and produced only two touchdowns against a young and inexperienced Cubs secondary. The run game was practically a non-factor, and one gets the feeling that if Herbert must pass 40 times a game it is going to be a very long year for him. The Pilots never had a lead against Chino last week and looked fortunate to have lost by only 25 points. It is still early, but the offence looked worse than I imagined, and I don't see it getting much better, unless Kenneth Walker III learns to break more tackles to overcome all the attention he will receive when teams catch on that Carson Wentz is a basket case. This season looks grim for both teams but grimmer for Seattle. **PICK: BILLTOWN**

CHINO @ IOWA CITY (line – CUBS by 1)

INJURIES: Chino – Kyle Dugger (OUT), Willie Gay (OUT), Romeo Okwara (OUT). Iowa City – Anthony Barr (OUT).

The Convicts under Jared Goff are an unknown quantity. It started well with a cakewalk win over Seattle, but the real story of that game was Christian McCaffrey. If he can stay healthy, McCaffrey may be the ultimate difference-maker to an offence that sputtered last year with Dak Prescott trying to do it alone. The Cubs surprised the Bats last week thanks to an old flame named Russell Wilson, who came to the rescue off the bench for an ineffective Derek Carr. Whether the Cubs go back to Carr or succumb to the pressure to keep old reliable in will be a game time decision according to the coach. It is hard to imagine the Cubs going far with that young defence, but with the suspect quality of the competition in the West Division, one never knows. This game could matter later when the division comes down to the wire. This is a bitter rivalry, so expect a good game, with the Cubs riding a wave of hope to prevail. **PICK: IOWA CITY**

DURHAM @ YORK (line – EXCALIBURS by 2)

INJURIES: Durham – None; York – Phidarian Mathis (IR), Aziz Ojulari (OUT), Jabari Zuniga (OUT).

The Excaliburs looked good on the road last week against what many believe is a playoff-calibre team in Brooklin. If York is going to exceed expectations in a tough Coastal Division, it will need to replicate what it did to the Hawks, with Derrick Henry battering the opposing defence, Tom Brady taking advantage of the focus on Henry, and the defence playing to a high level. This will be a tough test, however, against the defending champs, who are fresh off a mauling of the Swordfish. The Lizards recorded five interceptions and did not allow a touchdown against a well-regarded Fish offence. Was it due to the heavy rain, or is the Lizards' D that good again, with two rookies starting at corner? We will get a chance to see how they fare on the road, without the benefit of a fanatical crowd at their back. I expect this to be a good, close game with the ending coming down to a botched two-minute drill by the home side. **PICK: DURHAM**

BROOKLIN @ COWTOWN (line – CORN KINGS by 7)

INJURIES: Brooklin – Azeez Al-Shaair (OUT); Cowtown – Michael Pierce (OUT).

The Hawks had their wings unexpectedly clipped by York last week, as the offence failed to score until late in the 4th quarter long after the game had been decided. It was an inauspicious start for free agent signing Geno Smith and Hawk fans are hoping that their new quarterback was just experiencing opening day jitters and not showing his true colours. The Corn Kings are coming off a methodical win over the Blue Eagles, one in which Jamaal Williams did a passable imitation of Derrick Henry in grinding down the defence and Jimmy Garoppolo took advantage of play action opportunities. The Hawks have a similarly undermanned defensive front but a better secondary and linebacking corps, allowing them the luxury of bringing in run support. The Corn King defence was solid but made no big plays last week, something that will have to change here. Don't expect the Hawks of Week One to appear again this week. **PICK: BROOKLIN**

SEBASTIAN @ PICKERING (line – SPARTANS by 16)

INJURIES: Sebastian – Austin Johnson (OUT); Pickering – Kyle Dugger (OUT).

The Swordfish got off to a rocky start in the rain in Durham last week and it does not get any easier this week on the road against the powerful Spartans. There seemed to be nothing the Fish could do against the Durham defence, and they were forced to abandon their run game earlier than they would have liked, leaving Kirk Cousins exposed to the twin killers of the Lizards' pass rush and ball-hawking secondary. Pickering showed they are for real by humbling the North Stars in Week One. This is a confident team that believes that they are capable of doing anything. However, this is a defence that can be run against under the right circumstances. The key for Sebastian will be to bring its running back power to bear on it and attempt to slow the pace of the game. Should they fall behind too far, too early, they will find themselves in the same situation as last week, with an equally ball-hungry secondary laying in wait for Cousins and his

adequate, but not-so deadly receiving group. This is a large line for Week Two, and dangerous to take. **PICK: SEBASTIAN**

BUDAPEST @ SCARBOROUGH (line – NORTH STARS by 3)

INJURIES: Budapest – Jamel Dean (OUT), Minkah Fitzpatrick (OUT); Scarborough – None.

The North Stars continue their road trip to open the season against a more manageable opponent than they faced last week. While things are typically volatile this early in the season, the preliminary take on the Blue Eagles after they were slow rolled by Cowtown last week is “more of the same.” The attractive pieces of this roster are not supported, revealing an unbalanced team that a balanced team like the North Stars can exploit. The performance of Aaron Rodgers last week can be attributed partially to jet lag, lack of practice, and an elite opponent. But there were also times when Rodgers looked to be mailing it in, as if he was expecting another Pickering – one from two years ago – and not the full-service edition of this year. Going against his former team, in a hostile environment may be enough motivation. Coupled with the sting of being humiliated on national TV, expect a more energized Rodgers here. **PICK: BUDAPEST**

LAPLATA @ GEORGIA (line – GLADIATORS by 4)

INJURIES: LaPlata – None; Georgia – None.

Both teams are healthy and coming off big wins as they prepare to lock horns in an early battle to gain the edge in the division race. The Glads performed as expected against Erieau – big day from Tua Tagovailoa, effective run support from Josh Jacobs, and a defence that slowed down the opponent enough to make for a comfortable finish. The Braves, under their new coach, featured a good mix of play-calling and stuck with the run as a complementary tool even when it looked incapable of a serious breakthrough. The defence looked strong, but the quality of the opponent must be factored in. This will be a good game, as both teams will be challenged to find ways to navigate around the other’s obstacles. The Glads will need a bit more from Jacobs, as “Sauce” will pose a challenge to Diontae Johnson. The Braves will need more from Jahmyr Gibbs, to keep the Glads’ ‘D’ honest. It will come down to a field goal. **PICK: LAPLATA**

ERIEAU @ EAST ELMHURST (line – CADILLAC by 1)

INJURIES: Erieau – Joey Bosa (OUT); East Elmhurst – None.

The Cadillac stalled in the middle of the road last week against the Gladiators. This was very reminiscent of the “old” Cadillac, and not the team that had appeared to turn a corner last year. Kyler Murray “just ain’t right” and until he comes back to form, the entire Erieau offence is in jeopardy. Perhaps more disappointing was the disappearing pass rush – not a single sack last week. On the bright side, they now face an Irish team that looked incapable of much against the Braves last week. Jacoby Brissett is not going to get the job done with just DK Metcalf and a cottage barn full of stud ponies at running back against a good defence. And the Caddies’ defence, for all its absence last week, is still a good defence. For all the Irish’s woes, I do not see the Cadillac making them eat dust. This will be a slow-moving affair, steeped in drudgery, with many mistakes and too few highlights. Just the kind of game Erieau likes. **PICK: ERIEAU**

EFL FOCUS

A weekly tour of Media from around the EFL. This week we focus on.....

BUDAPEST



IS A WILDCARD IN THE CARDS FOR THE FADING NORTH STARS?

By Attila the Hun

I am going to break it down as simply as I can. I spoke to coach Darrin Jones in a private media session, and this is what he had to say about our North Stars heading into 2023:

2022 Record: 11-6, Wild Card entrant – Lost in Divisional Round of playoffs to Durham.

The Offense – Rodgers, Jefferson, Diggs and Kittle all return to what should be a potent passing attack, but its the same quartet that somehow lost their luster in the 2nd half of last season and could not breakthrough versus eventual EFL Champion Durham. The running

game can be productive if used right but the brittle nature of lead backs Cordelle Patterson and Rahim Mosert is cause for concern. The OL is solid but not spectacular – Ryan Ramczyk will again man Rodgers blind slide – Ben Jones was brought in to play centre, with Kenyon Green, Cam Jurgens and rookie Sidy Sow not ready for prime time. Depth at the skills positions is well below average, with Khalif Raymond a barely number 3 receiver and no one is behind TE George Kittle. At RB, rookie Devon Achane should see some reps in his 1st season – contributions remain to be seen.

The Defense – the trade of veteran safety, Quandre Diggs (no relation to Stefon) raised eyebrows in North Star land as the team grasped with the reality of pending Free Agents it had to sign. Still Minkah Fitzpatrick looks to rebound from an “off” year and Cameron Sutton is maturing and will start opposite of the reliable Jameel Dean at CB. DE Cam Jordan returns at a ransoms price (courtesy of divisional rival Brooklin Hawks spending spree) but he is the only DL who can get to the QB, while newly acquired Grover Stewart should fair well versus the run, the inability to get to the QB may haunt the North Stars when games are on the line. At Linebacker captain Lavonte David looks to keep his play at a high level, while OLB Frankie Luvu looked good in camp and looks to take the next step in contributing. The rest of the LB corp is below average, with Christian Harris looking to improve on an uninspiring rookie year. Rookies OLB Nolan Smith and CB Joquarian Bennett will be stuck down the depth chart as likely Budapest will go with veterans in nickel and dime schemes.

Special Teams – Nick Folk was brought to replace the inconsistent McManus. Return game should be decent with C.Patterson able to still break one , and PR Raymond always productive. New gunners and a punter give the revamped North Star ST unit a boost.

The Outlook – the Spartans are the team to beat in the Coastal, but Budapest can be formidable if their offense can be consistent and elite. Depth and lack of rookie impact may ultimately make the 2023 more of a grind – however excitement prevails entering the season and again Rodgers will be the focal point of success or failure.

