

WEEK
8



EFL 2023

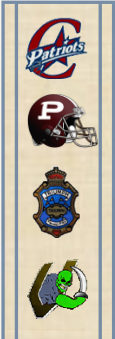
ELITE FOOTBALL LEAGUE

We're Number 1!
November 26, 2023
HE'S BAAAAACK!

EAST



CENTRAL



WEST



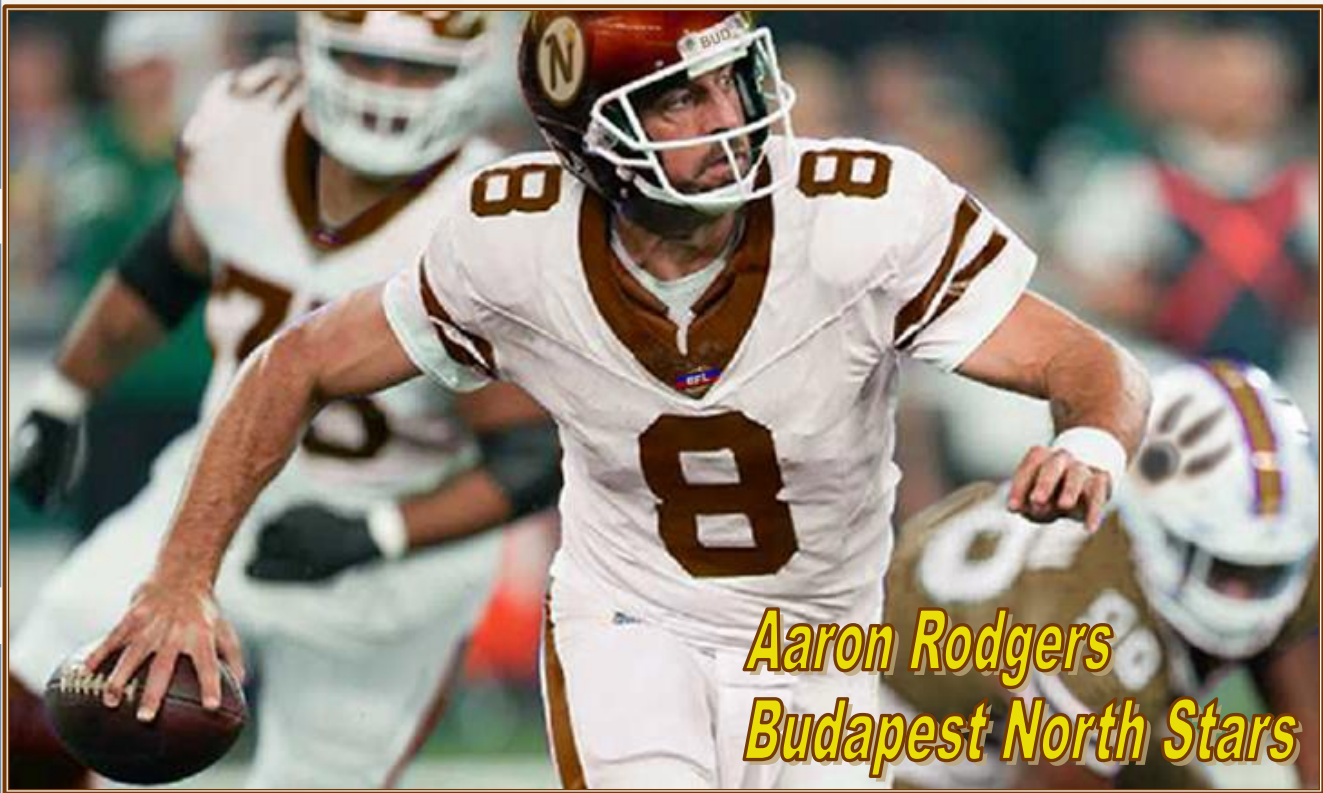
NORTH



COASTAL



SOUTH



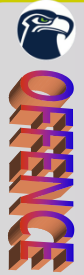
Aaron Rodgers
Budapest North Stars

North Stars' quarterback *Aaron Rodgers* sprints to his right with his eyes downfield in late third quarter action at Jurassic Park in Durham. Rodgers would end the quarter with a 10-yard TD pass to *Justin Jefferson* on the play, igniting a comeback that would end with Budapest overcoming a 13-point deficit and coming away with a 37-33 victory over the Thunder Lizards. Thought to be past his prime, Rodgers showed he is not done just yet. (Story inside)



Who was slick
in Week Eight?

“Brylcreem” THE
EFL'S FIRST SPONSOR



Drake London
WR
Brooklin
Hawks

6 Rec., 147 yds, 4 TDs, Lg 46. Big fast target for his QB in blowout win.



Matt Judon
OLB
Virden
Violators

12 Tk, 2 Sk, 2 TFL, 1 FF, 1 FR. All over the field shutting down NJ in Wk 8


3
24

A scrambling **Patrick Mahomes** checked down to **T.J. Hockenson** in the end zone for a 4-yard score with 5:44 left to put the Violators in a comfortable 21-3 lead. It was Mahomes' third TD pass of the game and 29th of the season, but it was not an easy day against a stubborn New Jersey defence that intercepted him once and held him to a 50% completion rate. The Wrecking Balls' problem was offence, where Virden LB, **Matt Judon** made life hard for **Daniel Jones**, finishing with 12 tackles, 2 sacks, 2 stuffs, a forced fumble and a recovery, helping to limit NJ to just 172 net yards.

11-26-2023 TERRORDOME Temp:72 Wind:Calm None Line:VV by 15 MVP:Judon HFA:ON(5)

	1	2	3	4	Tot
2023 New Jersey (4-4)	0	3	0	0	3
2023 Virden (8-0)	14	0	0	10	24

Passing

NJ: Jones 33/21 124 Yds

VV: Mahomes 44/22 275 Yds 3 TDs Int

Rushing

NJ: Robinson Jr. 13/31, Jones 10/29, Samuel 6/11, Brightwell 1/3

VV: Conner 7/25, Mahomes 5/18, Akers 3/6

Receiving

NJ: McLaurin 5/49, McKinnon 5/15, Hooper 4/26, Samuel 3/9, Allen 2/13, McBride 1/5

VV: Hill 5/67, Chase 5/77 TD, Olave 5/80, Hockenson 4/29 TD, Conner 3/22 TD

Defense

NJ: Hughes 9-Tk, King II Int 3-Tk

VV: Judon 2-Sks FF 12-Tk, Mosley 10-Tk, Clark Sk 4-Tk

Injuries

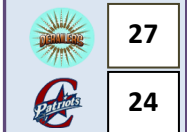
NJ: Awuzie 7, Winfield Jr. 1

VV: Humphries 5, Williams 1

Misc

NJ: Jones F-L, Ryland 1/1 FG 33 Lg

VV: Judon FR, Prater 1/1 FG 36 Lg


27
24

Lamar Jackson threw 3 TD passes and rushed for 126 yards to lead the Derailers to victory and end a six-game losing streak. Jackson's big day started with a 74-yard scramble on their first series that set up a 2-yard TD pass to **AJ Dillon**. Jackson would later burst free for a 26-yard run to set up a 2-yard TD pass to **Kadarius Toney** for a 27-14 lead early in the 4th quarter. **Kenny Pickett** closed the gap with a 10-yard TD pass to **Travis Kelce** and **Wil Lutz** nailed a 27-yard FG to pull within 3, but **Antonio Gibson** fumbled away the ball with 1:00 left to scrap the Pats comeback try.

11-26-2023 Patriot Place Temp:75 Wind:Calm Line:CHP by 7 MVP:Jackson HFA:ON(

	1	2	3	4	Tot
2023 Buffalo (2-6)	7	10	3	7	27
2023 Charleswood (2-6)	7	7	0	10	24

Passing

BUF: Jackson 30/25 175 Yds 3 TDs

CHP: Pickett 15/10 129 Yds 2 TDs

Rushing

BUF: Jackson 13/126, Dillon 19/92, Johnson 7/19, Abdullah 2/3, Bigsby 1/3

CHP: Pickett 5/50, Pacheco 7/25, Singletary 3/11 TD, Drake 4/3, Gibson 6/3

Receiving

BUF: Gage 6/42, Toney 4/21 TD, Reynolds 4/32, Rice 3/29, Dillon 2/0 TD, Fant 2/20

CHP: Kelce 6/105 TD, Gibson 2/9, Smith-Schuster 1/14 TD, Pacheco 1/1

Defense

BUF: Granderson Sk 5-Tk, Thibodeaux FF 6-Tk, Madubuike Sk 4-Tk

CHP: Brown Sk 6-Tk, Queen 9-Tk, Sweat Sk 3-Tk, Phillips FF 5-Tk, Emerson FF 5-Tk

Injuries

BUF: Robinson 4, Jackson 4

CHP: Ojabo 8, Cushenberry 4, Darby 4, Johnson Jr. 1, Campbell 1

Misc

BUF: 38:42 TOP, Madubuike FR, Elliott 2/2 FG 35 Lg

CHP: Gibson F-L, Lutz 1/1 FG 27 Lg



30

34

Devin Duvernay returned a kickoff 101 yards for a TD with 1:31 remaining to erase a 30-27 Cobb County lead and lift the Triumph to a win. Earlier, the Coyotes had tied the game at 27 on a 91-yard punt return fir a TD by **Montrell Washington** and had taken the lead on 49-yard **Jake Moody** FG prior to Duvernay's heroics. The Triumph built up a 20-7 1st half lead, helped by **Jaire Alexander's** 29-yard pick-six off **Bryce Young**, but the Coyotes clawed back in the 2nd half on a 5-yard TD pass to **Brandin Cooks** and three Moody FGs, the last set up by a 52-yard pass to Cooks.

11-26-2023 Wilhalla Stadium Temp:66 Wind:Calm None Line:TCT by 6 MVP:Duvernay HFA:

	1	2	3	4	Tot
2023 Cobb County (3-5)	0	7	10	13	30
2023 Twin Cities (6-2)	0	20	7	7	34

Passing

CB: Young 45/18 260 Yds 2 TDs Int
TCT: Lawrence 37/22 230 Yds TD

Rushing

CB: Young 5/47, Cook 12/40, Hill 7/11
TCT: Wilson 12/68 TD, Henderson Jr. 7/34, Lawrence 2/9

Receiving

CB: Cooks 8/140 TD, Cook 3/17, Addison 2/27, Pittman Jr. 2/45, Parker 1/17
TCT: Moore 6/77, Lockett 5/78, Higbee 5/34 TD, Wilson 3/3, Pierce 3/38

Defense

CB: Omenihu Sk 8-Tk, Oluokun 8-Tk
TCT: Hunter Sk 10-Tk, Weaver Sk FF 4-Tk, Alexander Int(TD) Tk, Joseph 8-Tk

Injuries

CB: Turner 7, Adams 6, Allen 5, White 1
TCT: Stingley Jr. 7, Moseley 3

Misc

CB: Washington 6/122 PR Lg 91 TD, Moody 3/3 FG 49 Lg
TCT: Duvernay 5/208 KR Lg 101 TD, McManus 1/1 FG 51 Lg, Hopkins 1/1 FG 30 Lg



17

24

Ryan Tannehill caught the Bombers in a run-commit and found **Kyle Pitts** open down the seam for a 26-yard TD pass with 2:33 left in the 3rd quarter, putting Peg City in front to stay, 21-17. The Bombers had taken the lead earlier to open the half on a 48-yard **Brett Maher** FG after a deadlocked 1st half finished with 14 apiece on a pair of **Justin Fields** TD runs for Bruxelles and a **Saquon Barkley** TD run and Tannehill TD pass for the Crusaders. The Pegs tacked on a **Younghoe Koo** FG early in the 4th then held off three straight Bombers' possessions, forcing turnovers on downs in the final two.

11-26-2023 True North Field Temp:72 Wind:Calm Line:BRX by 5 MVP:Tannehill HFA:

	1	2	3	4	Tot
2023 Bruxelles (6-2)	7	7	3	0	17
2023 Peg City (6-2)	7	7	7	3	24

Passing

BRX: Fields 25/14 157 Yds
PCC: Tannehill 33/22 234 Yds 2 TDs

Rushing

BRX: Fields 17/98 2 TDs, Fournette 8/26, Herbert 4/11, Foreman 3/8
PCC: Kamara 14/67, Barkley 16/38 TD, Tannehill 2/8, Aiyuk 1/4

Receiving

BRX: Hopkins 5/91, Godwin 3/33, Dulcich 3/11, Wilson 1/13, Fournette 1/6, Foreman 1/3
PCC: Kamara 7/42, Barkley 4/14, Pitts 4/69 TD, Sutton 3/41 TD, Meyers 2/33

Defense

BRX: Wilson 12-Tk, Ebukam Sk 7-Tk, Reed 10-Tk, Smith 8-Tk, Anzalone FF 5-Tk
PCC: Hutchinson Sk FF 9-Tk, Jones Sk 6-Tk, Lawrence Sk 3-Tk, Rapp 8-Tk

Injuries

BRX:
PCC:

Misc

BRX: Turpin 5/54 PR Lg 13, Maher 1/1 FG 48 Lg
PCC: McCloud 4/53 PR Lg 17, Koo 1/1 FG 41 Lg



45



38

Derek Carr threw 5 TD passes but also 3 interceptions to lead the Cubs to a wild win over Seattle. Carr's main target was **A.J. Brown**, who hauled in 4 passes, 3 of those for TDs, including a 30-yard strike with 0:12 left in the 1st half that gave Iowa City a 24-14 lead at the time. At one point the Cubs led 31-14 in the 3rd before **Carson Wentz** brought the Pilots to within 3 on back-to-back TD passes to **Jonathan Mingo** and **Tank Dell**, the latter set up by a **KeiTrel Clark** pick at the 16. But Carr regained the two-score edge and sealed the win with a 75-yard TD pass to **Josh Palmer** and Brown's 3rd TD.

11-26-2023 Kingdome Temp:70 Wind:Calm Line:ICC by 4 MVP:Brown HFA:ON(3)

	1	2	3	4	Tot
2023 Iowa City (4-4)	7	17	7	14	45
2023 Seattle (1-7)	7	7	14	10	38

Passing

ICC: Carr 27/14 235 Yds 5 TDs 3 Int, Wilson 1/1 35 Yds
SEA: Wentz 54/39 299 Yds 4 TDs Int, Lance 4/3 34 Yds

Rushing

ICC: Miller 11/81, Carter 12/27 TD, Johnson 5/24
SEA: Walker III 3/23, Hunt 4/17, Lance 6/11 TD, St. Brown 2/5

Receiving

ICC: Brown 4/115 3 TDs, Njoku 4/26, Dissly 3/19, Moore 2/28 TD, Palmer 1/75 TD
SEA: Hunt 12/49, Lamb 10/79 TD, Dell 8/130 2 TDs, Mingo 6/39 TD, Renfrow 4/26

Defense

ICC: Nelson FF 9-Tk, Johnson 9-Tk, Cross FF 6-Tk, Golston Sk 3-Tk, Smith 8-Tk
SEA: Smoot Sk FF 6-Tk, Baker Int 8-Tk, White 9-Tk, Joseph-Day Int 4-Tk

Injuries

ICC: Hooker 5, Noteboom 4, Smith 2
SEA: Washington 8, Sermon 6, Lattimore 2

Misc

ICC: Linderbaum FR, Tucker 1/2 FG 32 Lg
SEA: Dell F-L, McPherson 1/2 FG 55 Lg



28



23

Jared Goff threw TD passes of 56 and 25 yards to **Zay Flowers** and 4-yards to **Hayden Hurst** to lead the Convicts to victory over division rival, Billtown. Trailing 10-7 late in the 2nd quarter after **Justin Herbert** and **Quez Watkins** hooked up for a 70-yard catch-and-run TD, Goff drilled a pass to Flowers, who ducked a tackle and took it to the house for 56-yard score with 0:42 left in the 1st half. The score stayed 14-10 until early in the 4th, when **Christian McCaffrey** broke a 54-yard run that set up Hurst's TD. Chino never looked back, staying one score ahead of the Bats the rest of the way.

11-26-2023 Veteran Field Temp:38 Wind:5-15 None Line:CHI by 6 MVP:Goff HFA:ON(

	1	2	3	4	Tot
2023 Chino (6-2)	0	14	0	14	28
2023 Billtown (1-7)	3	7	0	13	23

Passing

CHI: Goff 32/19 212 Yds 3 TDs
BB: Herbert 42/33 348 Yds 2 TDs

Rushing

CHI: McCaffrey 12/82, Jones 11/71 TD, Flowers 1/10
BB: Harris 10/58, Spears 4/10, Herbert 3/7 TD, Breida 2/5

Receiving

CHI: McCaffrey 8/50, Flowers 4/96 2 TDs, Hurst 3/23 TD, Campbell 3/35, Jones 1/8
BB: Jeudy 9/134 TD, Hodgins 5/32, Thomas 4/23, Watkins 3/86 TD, Breida 3/12

Defense

CHI: Smith Sk 4-Tk, Miller Sk 3-Tk, Jackson 8-Tk, Jarrett Sk 3-Tk, Ward 8-Tk
BB: Pierre-Paul Sk 6-Tk, Davis 9-Tk, Bryant 8-Tk

Injuries

CHI: Jackson 4
BB: Leonard 5, Fuller 5, Hardman 5

Misc

CHI:
BB: Fairbairn 1/2 FG 24 Lg



37



33

Aaron Rodgers threw two TD passes to Stefon Diggs in a two-minute span in the 4th quarter to come back from down 33-24 and take a 37-33 lead. Then with Durham driving in Budapest territory, linebacker Frankie Luvu forced a Travis Homer fumble that DJ Wonnum recovered to preserve the lead and the win. After leading 14-0 early, the North Stars fell behind 30-17 late in the 3rd quarter when Curtis Samuel hauled in a 23-yard TD pass from Josh Allen. That's when Rodgers turned it on, capping a 75-yard drive with a TD pass to Justin Jefferson to set the stage for his late heroics.

11-26-2023 Jurassic Park Temp:62 Wind:Calm None Line:BUD by 1 MVP:Rodgers HFA:ON(

	1	2	3	4	Tot
2023 Budapest (6-2)	14	3	7	13	37
2023 Durham (5-3)	7	16	7	3	33

Passing

BUD: Rodgers 32/25 268 Yds 3 TDs
DTL: Allen 41/23 350 Yds 3 TDs 2 Int

Rushing

BUD: Patterson 10/34 TD, Mostert 7/19, Rodgers 1/18, Achane 3/12, Jones II 1/12
DTL: Allen 12/86 TD, Allgeier 13/40, Tucker 2/5

Receiving

BUD: Jefferson 11/137 TD, Diggs 7/97 2 TDs, Patterson 3/10, Mostert 1/5, Achane 1/3
DTL: Samuel 8/104 TD, Valdes-Scantling 5/86, Knox 4/102, Allgeier 3/15 TD, Waller 2/31 TD

Defense

BUD: Dean Int 7-Tk, Sutton Int 6-Tk, David 10-Tk
DTL: Simmons 11-Tk, Barton FF 5-Tk, Jones Sk 3-Tk

Injuries

BUD: Barno 2
DTL: Kupp 1

Misc

BUD: Mostert F-L, Wonnum FR, Raymond 1/46 PR Lg 46 TD, Folk 1/1 FG 28 Lg
DTL: Homer F-L, Mathieu FR, Santos 2/2 FG 40 Lg



31



19

Trailing 19-17 late in the 3rd, Jalen Hurts scrambled and dumped off a pass to D'Andre Swift, who made Andrew Van Ginkel miss on his way to a 10-yard TD and a 24-19 lead. It proved the game-winner, as the Spartans managed to hold on in the 4th, surviving a DeVonta Smith fumble in their own territory when Joey Slye missed the 48-yard FG try, and putting the game away on Kyle Dugger's 55-yard fumble return for a TD. Cowtown led this game 16-7 late in the 1st half, before Greg Zuerlein's 27-yard FG with no time remaining signalled the early start of the Pickering comeback.

11-22-2023 Tillman Field Temp:55 Wind:20-30 *Internet* Line:PIC by 8 MVP:Hurts HFA:ON(4)

	1	2	3	4	Tot
2023 Pickering (8-0)	7	3	14	7	31
2023 Cowtown (4-4)	7	9	3	0	19

Passing

PIC: Hurts 32/21 294 Yds 2 TDs Int
COW: Garoppolo 45/27 266 Yds

Rushing

PIC: Sanders 14/50 TD, Swift 3/14, Hurts 5/10, Gray 3/3
COW: Williams 13/100 2 TDs, Murray 7/27, Garoppolo 2/11, Watson 1/4

Receiving

PIC: Smith 7/80 TD, Pickens 3/88, Brown 3/39, Swift 2/35 TD, Freiermuth 2/30
COW: Evans 10/125, Lazard 5/53, Watson 3/23, LaPorta 3/32, Murray 3/8, Ferguson 2/17

Defense

PIC: Elliss Sk FF 4-Tk, Woolen 9-Tk
COW: Peterson Int FF 5-Tk, Smith 13-Tk, Ngakoue Sk 4-Tk, Harmon 9-Tk

Injuries

PIC:
COW:

Misc

PIC: Smith F-L, Dugger FR TD, Zuerlein 1/2 FG 27 Lg
COW: Davis FR, Garoppolo F-L, Carter 4/56 PR Lg 17, Slye 2/3 FG 46 Lg



29



43

Avery Williams fumbled at his own 32 and **Dion Dawkins** of the Hawks recovered, setting up a 32-yard TD pass to **Evan Engram** to give Brooklin a 36-29 4th quarter lead. **Geno Smith** then put away the Swordfish for good with a 46-yard TD bomb to **Drake London** with 2:36 remaining. It was the 5th TD pass for Smith, and the 4th to London, who finished with 6 catches for 147 yards. Before the Hawks' surge, this was a back-and-forth game with the lead changing hands 8 times. **Kirk Cousins** hooked up with **Zay Jones** for a 62-yard highlight reel TD, but also threw 3 picks in the loss.

11-26-2023 Hawkeye Park Temp:47 Wind:0-5 None Line:BRH by 6 MVP:London HFA:ON(3)

	1	2	3	4	Tot
2023 Sebastian (1-7)	3	10	9	7	29
2023 Brooklin (3-5)	0	21	7	15	43

Passing

SS: Cousins 38/25 266 Yds 2 TDs 3 Int
BRH: Smith 35/26 334 Yds 5 TDs 2 Int

Rushing

SS: Chubb 28/118 TD, Taylor 4/13
BRH: Ekeler 8/26 TD, Robinson 5/14, Davis 2/11

Receiving

SS: Gallup 7/82, Johnson 4/33 TD, Taylor 4/11, Schultz 3/21, Jones 3/99 TD
BRH: Engram 7/81 TD, London 6/147 4 TDs, Ekeler 5/22, Hollins 3/47, Robinson 3/15

Defense

SS: Jenkins 10-Tk, Hicks 8-Tk
BRH: Simmons Int 14-Tk, Epenesa Sk 8-Tk, Jones Int 5-Tk, Brisker FF 6-Tk, Curl 8-Tk

Injuries

SS: Deablo 5, Tuipulotu 1, Johnson 1
BRH: Bolles 8, Vander Esch 2

Misc

SS: Williams F-L, Carlson 3/3 FG 56 Lg
BRH: Dawkins FR, Bullock 0/1 FG



20



28

Clinging to a 14-12 lead early in the 4th quarter, the Excaliburs turned to their workhorse to put the game away. In consecutive possessions, **Derrick Henry** carried a total 9 times for 84 yards and a TD and fullback **Michael Burton** finished off the second drive with a 2-yard TD run to give York a 28-12 cushion. It was all they would need to pick up their 5th win, ending a two-game skid. Henry finished with 216 yards on 36 carries and 3 TDs, giving him 10 on the season. **Gus Edwards** had 2 rushing TDs and **Joe Burrow** tossed a TD pass to **Dalvin Cook** to account for the Scarborough scoring.

11-26-2023 Camelot Temp:46 Wind:0-5 None Line:YOR by 11 MVP:Henry HFA:ON(3)

	1	2	3	4	Tot
2023 Scarborough (1-7)	6	0	0	14	20
2023 York (5-3)	0	14	0	14	28

Passing

SBE: Burrow 26/21 161 Yds TD Int
YOR: Brady 30/20 146 Yds

Rushing

SBE: Cook 12/64, Edwards 4/26 2 TDs, Perine 2/9, Burrow 1/3
YOR: Henry 36/216 3 TDs, Scott 4/27, Burton 1/2 TD

Receiving

SBE: Landry 6/52, Perine 4/18, Dotson 3/36, Cook 3/24 TD, Zaccheaus 3/20, Cobb 2/11
YOR: St. Brown 8/64, Williams 7/71, Scott 2/1, Davis 1/6, Kmet 1/6, Burton 1/-2

Defense

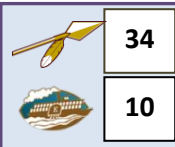
SBE: Bosa FF 7-Tk, Hufanga FF 6-Tk, Davis 9-Tk, Jones Sk 3-Tk, Speed 8-Tk
YOR: Douglas Int 4-Tk, Poyer FF 5-Tk

Injuries

SBE: Robinson 3
YOR: Mathis 8, Zuniga 7, Williams 7, Holcomb 4, Gary 4, Burks 2

Misc

SBE:
YOR: Gould 0/1 FG



Rookie QB **C.J. Stroud** threw 3 TD passes and posted a perfect 158.3 passer rating, completing 14 of 15 for 232 yards to lead the Braves over the Cadillac. Stroud was helped by strong showings by RBs, **Jahmyr Gibbs** and **Joe Mixon**, who combined for 205 yards on 37 carries, each with a TD run. Eriean was never in the game. The Braves built up a 20-0 lead on TD passes of 6 yards to Mixon, 30 yards to **Dallas Goedert** and 35 yards to **Davante Adams** before a **Jason Myers** FG broke the shutout at halftime. **Kyler Murray** struggled to produce against a strong LaPlata defence.

11-26-2023 Kelly-Burke Field Temp:48 Wind:0-5 None Line:LPB by 1 MVP:Stroud HFA

	1	2	3	4	Tot
2023 LaPlata (3-5)	7	13	7	7	34
2023 Erieau (2-6)	0	3	7	0	10

Passing

LPB: Stroud 15/14 232 Yds 3 TDs

ERI: Murray 28/15 191 Yds TD

Rushing

LPB: Gibbs 15/113 TD, Mixon 22/92 TD, Stroud 2/12

ERI: Murray 5/42, Harris 7/38, Pierce 4/12, Michel 4/11

Receiving

LPB: Adams 6/143 TD, Thielen 3/26, Goedert 2/48 TD, Mixon 2/8 TD, Atwell 1/7

ERI: Higgins 4/54, Henry 3/15, Waddle 2/75 TD, Harris 2/23, Hines 1/3, Pierce 1/4

Defense

LPB: Cominsky 2-Sks 3-Tk

ERI: Garrett Sk 9-Tk, Takitaki 12-Tk, Hill Sk 5-Tk, Crosby Sk 3-Tk

Injuries

LPB: Vera-Tucker 6, Stanley 2

ERI: Robinson 8, Bosa 4

Misc

LPB: Stroud 158.3 QB Rat

ERI: Myers 1/1 FG 21 Lg



Tua Tagovailoa finished off a 75-yard 2nd half opening drive with a 4-yard TD pass to **Diontae Johnson** to break a 21-all tie and put the Gladiators in front to stay. Johnson caught a 45-yard pass on the Glads' next series to set up a 2-yard TD run by **Josh Jacobs** to increase their lead to 35-21. Georgia completed its dominance of the 2nd half with Tua's 4th TD pass of the game, 3rd TD to **Amari Cooper**, and a 48-yard fumble return by **Damontae Kazee** on a lateral in the 4th. The Irish were in the game throughout the 1st half, thanks to 3 TD passes from **Sam Darnold** to **DK Metcalf**.

11-26-2023 Mgr.McClancy Mem St Temp:43 Wind:0-10 None Line:GEO by 5 MVP:Tagovailoa H

	1	2	3	4	Tot
2023 Georgia (5-3)	14	7	14	14	49
2023 East Elmhurst (4-4)	14	7	0	7	28

Passing

GEO: Tagovailoa 34/25 378 Yds 4 TDs

EE: Darnold 41/26 426 Yds 4 TDs Int

Rushing

GEO: Stevenson 10/82 TD, Jacobs 15/43 TD

EE: Charbonnet 14/54, Darnold 5/25, Huntley 3/25, Ingram 1/5, Watt 1/3

Receiving

GEO: Johnson 8/119 TD, Cooper 7/149 3 TDs, Stevenson 3/24, Smith-Njigba 2/21

EE: Metcalf 10/164 3 TDs, Granson 4/71, Moore 4/39 TD, Charbonnet 4/60, Jones 2/66

Defense

GEO: Ford 2-Sks FF 2-Tk, Ward Int 7-Tk

EE: Epps 9-Tk

Injuries

GEO: McCloud 1

EE:

Misc

GEO: Kazee FR TD, Bass 7/7 XP

EE: Darnold F-L



WEEK EIGHT

STANDINGS & STATS

2023 EFL - Week 8 Standings

East	W	L	T	Pct	Stk	Pts	Ave	Opp	Ave	Diff	Home	Div	Conf
Bruxelles	6	2	0	.750	L1	236	29.5	163	20.4	9.1	3 0 0	2 1 0	4 2 0
New Jersey	4	4	0	.500	L2	143	17.9	132	16.5	1.4	1 3 0	1 2 0	3 3 0
Cobb County	3	5	0	.375	L1	194	24.3	213	26.6	-2.4	1 2 0	2 1 0	2 4 0
Buffalo	2	6	0	.250	W1	123	15.4	213	26.6	-11.3	1 3 0	1 2 0	2 4 0
Central	W	L	T	Pct	Stk	Pts	Ave	Opp	Ave	Diff	Home	Div	Conf
Viriden	8	0	0	1.000	W8	296	37.0	93	11.6	25.4	4 0 0	2 0 0	6 0 0
Peg City	6	2	0	.750	W1	172	21.5	159	19.9	1.6	3 1 0	1 1 0	5 1 0
Twin Cities	6	2	0	.750	W6	227	28.4	155	19.4	9.0	4 1 0	1 1 0	4 2 0
Charleswood	2	6	0	.250	L1	160	20.0	207	25.9	-5.9	1 4 0	0 2 0	0 6 0
West	W	L	T	Pct	Stk	Pts	Ave	Opp	Ave	Diff	Home	Div	Conf
Chino	6	2	0	.750	W2	190	23.8	156	19.5	4.3	3 1 0	2 1 0	4 2 0
Iowa City	4	4	0	.500	W1	241	30.1	264	33.0	-2.9	1 2 0	3 0 0	4 2 0
Seattle	1	7	0	.125	L6	83	10.4	234	29.3	-18.9	1 3 0	1 2 0	1 5 0
Billtown	1	7	0	.125	L3	120	15.0	231	28.9	-13.9	0 5 0	0 3 0	1 5 0
North	W	L	T	Pct	Stk	Pts	Ave	Opp	Ave	Diff	Home	Div	Conf
Durham	5	3	0	.625	L1	219	27.4	197	24.6	2.8	3 2 0	2 1 0	4 2 0
Cowtown	4	4	0	.500	L3	178	22.3	180	22.5	-0.3	1 3 0	2 1 0	4 2 0
Sebastian	1	7	0	.125	L2	154	19.3	250	31.3	-12.0	0 3 0	1 2 0	1 5 0
Scarborough	1	7	0	.125	L5	175	21.9	233	29.1	-7.3	0 4 0	1 2 0	1 5 0
Coastal	W	L	T	Pct	Stk	Pts	Ave	Opp	Ave	Diff	Home	Div	Conf
Pickering	8	0	0	1.000	W8	274	34.3	117	14.6	19.6	4 0 0	2 0 0	6 0 0
Budapest	6	2	0	.750	W3	201	25.1	158	19.8	5.4	3 0 0	0 2 0	4 2 0
York	5	3	0	.625	W1	218	27.3	161	20.1	7.1	2 2 0	2 0 0	4 2 0
Brooklin	3	5	0	.375	W2	173	21.6	189	23.6	-2.0	3 2 0	0 2 0	2 4 0
South	W	L	T	Pct	Stk	Pts	Ave	Opp	Ave	Diff	Home	Div	Conf
Georgia	5	3	0	.625	W3	236	29.5	202	25.3	4.3	2 2 0	3 0 0	4 2 0
East Elmhurst	4	4	0	.500	L1	177	22.1	236	29.5	-7.4	3 1 0	1 2 0	2 4 0
LaPlata	3	5	0	.375	W1	152	19.0	154	19.3	-0.3	2 2 0	2 1 0	3 3 0
Erieau	2	6	0	.250	L3	156	19.5	201	25.1	-5.6	0 4 0	0 3 0	1 5 0

Passing		G	Att	Cmp	C%	Yds	Y/C	Lg	25	50	In	I%	Td	Td%	Sk	Rate
1 Hurts	PIC	8	169	116	68.6	1596	13.8	50	12	1	2	1.2	15	8.9	4	123.3
2 Mahomes	VV	8	283	181	64.0	2533	14.0	75	22	0	6	2.1	29	10.2	5	118.0
3 Tagovailoa	GEO	7	240	147	61.3	2120	14.4	49	22	0	11	4.6	23	9.6	4	102.8
4 Tannehill	PCC	6	161	104	64.6	1262	12.1	57	8	0	3	1.9	9	5.6	10	99.4
5 Garoppolo	COW	8	259	172	66.4	1955	11.4	57	11	1	5	1.9	13	5.0	14	97.6
6 Brissett	EE	6	176	112	63.6	1139	10.2	44	8	0	3	1.7	11	6.3	9	95.8
7 Fields	BRX	8	175	114	65.1	1374	12.1	52	13	0	4	2.3	7	4.0	14	92.9
8 Goff	CHI	8	291	195	67.0	1814	9.3	56	7	0	3	1.0	11	3.8	6	92.2
9 Jones	NJ	8	236	161	68.2	1349	8.4	54	6	0	2	0.8	8	3.4	21	90.5
10 Burrow	SBE	8	243	157	64.6	1533	9.8	65	11	0	7	2.9	14	5.8	9	89.4
11 Rodgers	BUD	8	264	168	63.6	1844	11.0	74	14	0	8	3.0	14	5.3	11	89.3
12 Lawrence	TCT	8	262	164	62.6	1704	10.4	37	13	0	4	1.5	10	3.8	10	87.7
13 Smith	BRH	8	302	199	65.9	1858	9.3	47	12	0	7	2.3	13	4.3	12	87.3
14 Young	CB	8	270	157	58.1	2034	13.0	52	13	0	9	3.3	13	4.8	21	84.1
15 Allen	DTL	8	271	156	57.6	2036	13.1	54	16	0	12	4.4	17	6.3	12	83.8
16 Brady	YOR	8	282	180	63.8	1905	10.6	66	9	0	8	2.8	10	3.5	9	83.4
17 Murray	ERI	5	176	115	65.3	1075	9.3	69	5	0	3	1.7	4	2.3	11	82.5
18 Herbert	BB	8	301	201	66.8	1737	8.6	72	8	0	7	2.3	8	2.7	17	80.9
19 Carr	ICC	7	137	71	51.8	1057	14.9	75	13	0	8	5.8	11	8.0	2	79.9
20 Jackson	BUF	8	253	156	61.7	1410	9.0	73	5	0	7	2.8	9	3.6	24	77.0
21 Pickett	CHP	8	228	139	61.0	1447	10.4	45	11	0	8	3.5	8	3.5	19	76.4
22 Cousins	SS	8	310	200	64.5	1842	9.2	62	10	0	13	4.2	9	2.9	19	72.8
23 Wentz	SEA	7	209	132	63.2	1114	8.4	46	6	0	9	4.3	5	2.4	14	67.0

Kick Returns		G	No	Yds	Avg	Lg	Td	Punt Returns		G	No	FC	Yds	Avg	Lg	Td	
1 Jackson	CHI	8	14	407	29.1	50	0	1	Covey	YOR	8	30	5	408	13.6	86	1
2 Williams	BUF	8	17	400	23.5	36	0	2	Turpin	BRX	8	19	8	344	18.1	52	0
3 Berrios	LPB	8	12	317	26.4	47	0	3	Washington	CB	8	24	3	256	10.7	91	1
4 Powell	PCC	8	13	304	23.4	38	0	4	Carter	COW	8	20	5	238	11.9	18	0
5 Duvernay	TCT	8	10	300	30.0	101	1	5	Duvernay	TCT	8	19	6	235	12.4	19	0
6 Agnew	GEO	8	12	288	24.0	45	0	6	McCloud	PCC	8	19	7	208	10.9	23	0
7 Haskins	SBE	8	12	281	23.4	32	0	7	Hines	ERI	8	19	8	198	10.4	30	0
8 Rodgers	CHP	8	9	276	30.7	51	0	8	Raymond	BUD	8	10	12	165	16.5	63	1
9 Hines	ERI	8	9	251	27.9	34	0	9	Williams	SS	8	15	6	148	9.9	19	0
10 Carter	COW	8	11	239	21.7	35	0	10	Woods	BUF	8	22	3	144	6.5	28	0
11 Scott	DTL	8	10	237	23.7	37	0	11	Dell	SEA	8	18	3	137	7.6	29	0
12 Sims	VV	8	7	178	0.0	44	0	12	Taylor	NJ	8	15	7	130	8.7	17	0
13 Nixon	BRX	8	6	174	0.0	38	0	13	Agnew	GEO	8	15	7	128	8.5	16	0
14 Brightwell	NJ	8	7	158	0.0	29	0	14	Reed	SBE	8	12	4	120	10.0	35	0
15 Washington	BRH	8	8	155	19.4	41	0	15	Jones	ICC	8	10	3	89	8.9	12	0
16 Jones	ICC	8	5	152	0.0	35	0	16	Smith	CHI	8	11	4	88	8.0	21	0
17 Patterson	BUD	6	6	151	0.0	35	0	17	Berrios	LPB	8	9	7	84	9.3	16	0
18 Williams	SS	8	7	139	0.0	27	0	18	Rodgers	EE	8	7	4	73	0.0	16	0
19 Johnston	EE	8	9	129	14.3	22	0	19	Sims	VV	8	11	16	71	6.5	14	0
20 Washington	CB	8	8	124	15.5	19	0	20	Holland	CHP	8	11	3	66	6.0	16	0
21 Gray	PIC	8	6	122	0.0	28	0	21	Palmer	DTL	8	5	19	57	0.0	22	0
22 Covey	YOR	8	6	121	0.0	27	0	22	Milne	BUD	6	6	0	53	0.0	15	0
23 Scott	YOR	8	4	120	0.0	32	0	23	Gray	PIC	8	6	9	47	0.0	14	0
24 Spears	BB	8	7	102	0.0	25	0	24	King II	NJ	8	3	0	41	0.0	17	0
25 Mingo	SEA	8	7	96	0.0	27	0	25	Washington	BRH	8	10	2	41	4.1	14	0

Rushing		G	Att	Yds	Avg	Gain	10	25	50	FD	Lg	Td	Att/G	Yds/G	
1	Henry	YOR	8	216	955	4.4	82.4	23	0	0	51	79	10	27.0	119.4
2	Chubb	SS	8	162	759	4.7	84.0	26	0	0	46	36	6	20.3	94.9
3	Fields	BRX	8	104	756	7.3	82.7	34	0	0	52	56	11	13.0	94.5
4	Wilson	TCT	8	103	709	6.9	82.5	19	1	0	31	52	7	12.9	88.6
5	Cook	SBE	8	144	687	4.8	79.9	15	0	0	32	64	4	18.0	85.9
6	Jacobs	GEO	8	149	650	4.4	81.2	15	0	0	29	68	2	18.6	81.3
7	Sanders	PIC	8	141	619	4.4	80.9	16	0	0	34	21	7	17.6	77.4
8	Jackson	BUF	8	84	509	6.1	73.8	16	0	0	27	74	4	10.5	63.6
9	Johnson	ICC	8	84	497	5.9	85.7	14	0	0	24	53	4	10.5	62.1
10	McCaffrey	CHI	8	113	495	4.4	76.1	10	0	0	31	54	8	14.1	61.9
11	Foreman	BRX	8	107	494	4.6	76.6	11	0	0	19	58	3	13.4	61.8
12	Dillon	BUF	8	117	459	3.9	80.3	11	0	0	27	26	1	14.6	57.4
13	Jones	NJ	8	90	442	4.9	77.8	18	0	0	41	24	2	11.3	55.3
14	Gibbs	LPB	8	79	442	5.6	75.9	12	0	0	19	62	3	9.9	55.3
15	Williams	COW	8	120	441	3.7	75.8	11	0	0	23	38	5	15.0	55.1
16	Walker III	SEA	8	101	436	4.3	78.2	15	0	0	19	40	1	12.6	54.5
17	Allen	DTL	8	65	420	6.5	78.5	18	1	0	23	31	2	8.1	52.5
18	Robinson	BRH	8	74	414	5.6	83.8	10	0	0	24	58	3	9.3	51.8
19	Etienne	CB	8	86	405	4.7	69.8	12	0	0	18	88	1	10.8	50.6
20	Jones	CHI	8	79	404	5.1	67.1	15	0	0	25	35	3	9.9	50.5
21	Mixon	LPB	8	110	404	3.7	81.8	8	0	0	25	19	4	13.8	50.5
22	Conner	VV	8	99	398	4.0	80.8	7	0	0	26	23	4	12.4	49.8
23	Barkley	PCC	8	115	377	3.3	83.5	7	1	0	17	35	5	14.4	47.1
24	Harris	BB	8	60	364	6.1	90.0	12	0	0	21	15	0	7.5	45.5
25	Kamara	PCC	7	68	357	5.3	83.8	10	0	0	15	27	1	9.7	51.0
26	Allgeier	DTL	7	86	330	3.8	76.7	5	0	0	12	16	2	12.3	47.1
27	Pacheco	CHP	8	79	314	4.0	77.2	4	0	0	11	36	2	9.9	39.3
28	Pickett	CHP	8	38	309	8.1	94.7	11	0	0	20	29	2	4.8	38.6
29	Hurts	PIC	8	52	308	5.9	84.6	14	0	0	25	32	5	6.5	38.5
30	Murray	COW	6	56	306	5.5	87.5	8	0	0	11	61	1	9.3	51.0
31	Mostert	BUD	8	60	299	5.0	85.0	7	0	0	15	46	2	7.5	37.4
32	Patterson	BUD	6	62	295	4.8	82.3	5	0	0	16	39	4	10.3	49.2
33	Montgomery	NJ	7	80	288	3.6	81.3	5	0	0	12	29	1	11.4	41.1
34	Fournette	BRX	7	61	283	4.6	86.9	6	0	0	14	22	3	8.7	40.4
35	Harris	ERI	8	76	280	3.7	81.6	6	0	0	17	22	3	9.5	35.0
36	Pierce	ERI	8	65	272	4.2	78.5	5	0	0	10	78	1	8.1	34.0
37	Ekeler	BRH	8	65	267	4.1	84.6	7	0	0	17	16	5	8.1	33.4
38	Dobbins	CHP	7	54	259	4.8	74.1	8	0	0	11	44	2	7.7	37.0
39	White	PIC	8	56	244	4.4	71.4	7	0	0	10	29	1	7.0	30.5
40	Stevenson	GEO	8	55	239	4.3	76.4	6	0	0	12	27	1	6.9	29.9
41	Young	CB	8	32	225	7.0	81.3	8	0	0	16	31	4	4.0	28.1
42	Spears	BB	8	45	224	5.0	82.2	7	0	0	16	30	1	5.6	28.0
43	Mahomes	VV	8	34	221	6.5	88.2	9	0	0	10	20	0	4.3	27.6
44	Akers	VV	8	50	205	4.1	84.0	5	0	0	16	22	1	6.3	25.6
45	Huntley	EE	4	40	199	5.0	90.0	7	0	0	15	17	2	10.0	49.8

Receiving		G	No	Dp	Att	Rac	Yds	Avg	25	50	FD	Lg	Td	Rec/G	Yds/G
1 Jefferson	BUD	8	56	3	90	82	699	12.5	6	0	39	38	4	7.0	87.4
2 Hill	VV	8	53	4	92	226	1004	18.9	11	0	38	75	10	6.6	125.5
3 Adams	LPB	8	53	0	76	181	879	16.6	8	0	36	62	2	6.6	109.9
4 Metcalf	EE	8	52	4	78	121	693	13.3	5	0	37	37	5	6.5	86.6
5 McCaffrey	CHI	8	50	3	68	478	353	7.1	2	0	21	30	3	6.3	44.1
6 Jones	SS	8	48	1	73	176	519	10.8	4	0	20	62	3	6.0	64.9
7 Jeudy	BB	8	47	7	69	127	549	11.7	2	0	26	72	1	5.9	68.6
8 Ekeler	BRH	8	47	0	65	337	257	5.5	0	0	11	20	2	5.9	32.1
9 Lamb	SEA	8	45	2	74	93	534	11.9	2	0	31	46	1	5.6	66.8
10 Cooks	CB	8	44	8	75	186	666	15.1	7	0	34	52	3	5.5	83.3
11 Moore	TCT	8	44	4	72	98	580	13.2	6	0	33	34	4	5.5	72.5
12 Evans	COW	8	42	6	69	177	577	13.7	5	1	24	51	4	5.3	72.1
13 Chase	VV	8	42	6	64	96	564	13.4	3	0	35	28	5	5.3	70.5
14 St. Brown	YOR	8	42	0	65	117	435	10.4	1	0	22	56	2	5.3	54.4
15 Williams	YOR	8	41	1	68	118	500	12.2	3	0	30	39	2	5.1	62.5
16 Godwin	BRX	8	41	3	56	159	559	13.6	6	0	27	52	4	5.1	69.9
17 Gage	BUF	8	41	1	65	58	327	8.0	0	0	21	19	2	5.1	40.9
18 Allen	NJ	8	40	0	58	122	390	9.8	2	0	20	54	4	5.0	48.8
19 Hodgins	BB	8	39	3	58	55	349	8.9	2	0	14	29	0	4.9	43.6
20 Lazard	COW	8	39	4	57	186	536	13.7	4	0	24	57	2	4.9	67.0
21 Johnson	GEO	8	39	4	69	141	576	14.8	5	0	33	45	6	4.9	72.0
22 London	BRH	8	38	5	65	148	597	15.7	7	0	32	47	6	4.8	74.6
23 Brown	ICC	8	38	4	72	218	884	23.3	15	0	34	66	11	4.8	110.5
24 Waddle	ERI	8	37	4	65	129	631	17.1	7	0	25	69	3	4.6	78.9
25 Flowers	CHI	8	37	2	55	101	447	12.1	2	0	27	56	4	4.6	55.9
26 Kelce	CHP	8	37	3	63	104	423	11.4	2	0	27	29	2	4.6	52.9
27 Diggs	BUD	8	37	2	74	90	394	10.6	3	0	22	46	4	4.6	49.3
28 Smith	PIC	8	36	5	52	81	557	15.5	5	0	29	30	5	4.5	69.6
29 Andrews	ERI	7	36	3	48	115	395	11.0	2	0	18	43	2	5.1	56.4
30 Samuel	DTL	8	36	4	57	78	419	11.6	1	0	30	25	5	4.5	52.4
31 Pittman Jr.	CB	8	35	0	55	66	479	13.7	2	0	26	30	1	4.4	59.9
32 Higbee	TCT	8	35	6	57	67	321	9.2	1	0	23	26	3	4.4	40.1
33 Thielen	LPB	8	35	0	49	73	355	10.1	1	0	21	33	5	4.4	44.4
34 Dotson	SBE	8	34	1	50	203	507	14.9	4	0	25	65	7	4.3	63.4
35 Woods	BUF	8	34	5	55	103	387	11.4	3	0	20	49	1	4.3	48.4
36 Stevenson	GEO	8	34	3	49	396	357	10.5	4	0	14	43	1	4.3	44.6
37 Kmet	YOR	8	32	0	52	99	345	10.8	2	0	21	39	3	4.0	43.1
38 Cooper	GEO	8	32	2	59	119	753	23.5	13	0	31	49	11	4.0	94.1
39 Peoples-Jones	SS	8	32	0	51	47	441	13.8	4	0	21	32	1	4.0	55.1
40 Engram	BRH	8	32	2	53	81	329	10.3	1	0	18	32	2	4.0	41.1
41 McKinnon	NJ	8	31	0	38	309	245	7.9	2	0	11	38	2	3.9	30.6
42 Kamara	PCC	7	31	2	46	320	264	8.5	1	0	14	25	1	4.4	37.7
43 Boyd	CHI	8	30	1	44	31	362	12.1	1	0	20	25	1	3.8	45.3
44 Lockett	TCT	8	30	0	48	79	351	11.7	3	0	22	32	2	3.8	43.9
45 McLaurin	NJ	8	30	1	50	46	308	10.3	1	0	16	40	1	3.8	38.5



AROUND THE



With Spats McChad

NEW YORK – I am issuing my team mid-term grades this week. It is not quite the halfway point, but in an awkwardly constructed 17-week season there is no halfway point, so I had to make a choice as to when the “mid-term” would be. I chose earlier (Week Eight) rather than later (Week Nine) because I sense my guidance is needed more urgently than ever this year if more than half the teams in the league are going to “pass” their season. By “pass,” I mean to meet or exceed expectations and not be the worst team in the league – the worst team always earns an ‘F’ grade as an example to others not to be *that* team.

Having said that, I did not “fail” anybody at mid-term. One must give hope to the struggling students. Failure is a grade best reserved for completion of the full term. Although I have on rare occasions failed an exceptionally horrendous effort at mid-term, for the most part I look on the bright side if there is any brightness to perceive. Sadly, contrasting the shining stars of a few excellent squads this year is a glob of dimly lit and dark potential failures who need to be called out before it is too late for them.

My report card is at the end of this article. Some of you will jump straight to it, skipping my specific Week Eight observations. Before you do, first understand that I do not mean to be nasty if your team is in danger of summer school. I care about your team and the competitiveness of the league I make a tidy sum covering for a living. If all the teams became like Billtown or Seattle, nobody would care about the sport, and I would be forced to cover golf or women’s basketball or spend my *Fool* shareholdings drinking at innumerable sports bars with no purpose until I was destitute. I have an interest in the success of all, or more accurately, to paraphrase the army, that your team be all that it can be.

Before we go there, let us have a quick look at this week’s action....

HOT DIGGITY DIGGS

The North Stars are showing signs of age; the Thunder Lizards are still dealing with their Championship Hangover™; neither team is ripping through the EFL schedule so far. But coming into their Week Eight face-off, there was no game more interesting to both the media establishment and football fandom than this one. The schedule-makers slated it for *Monday Night Football*, to make sure both teams were physically healed and mentally prepared from the previous Sunday to deliver a show for fans on three continents.

Yes, the North Stars are still a three-continent team. They retain a strong following in their old home of Markham, their current home of Budapest, and in Markham’s Sister City, Foshan, Guangdong Province, China. The trick is getting all these continents to watch the game together. The 8:30 pm ET Monday night kickoff time in Durham corresponds to Tuesday, 2:30 am in Budapest and 9:30 am in Foshan. Ironically, the fans in Budapest, the current home seat of the North Stars, suffer most due to the time differential, which is why a North Stars appearance on the prestigious *Monday Night Football* is so rare. But, in the end, ratings in North America matter more than those in Central Europe and China. With the only other “premium” match-up of Week Eight, New Jersey at Virden, slated for *Sunday Night Football*, Budapest versus Durham was the most profitable choice for Monday night.

There were several storylines that made this game compelling to the media in the week leading up to it.

First: *Is Aaron Rodgers washed up?* The answer was “no,” of course. “Washed up” is too strong to describe what Rodgers has put his team through so far this year. But is he delivering the locked-in performance expected of a player of his stature week-in, week-out? The answer was “no” to that as well. Rodgers has looked elite at times this year, and he has looked godawful as well. A three-touchdown outing against the Cubs last week was not enough to quell the whispers of fading capabilities – the Cubs don’t count for purposes of measuring effectiveness as their defence is an outlier of ineptitude. The Pickering game in Week One had been bad, but explainable. The York game in Week Five had been horrendous and inexcusable. Something wasn’t right, and analysts were ready to attribute what success he was enjoying to his wide receivers. How Rodgers handled the Lizards was a focus of attention.

Second: *Is Durham coach, George Kaldis losing it?* The question was not posed so crassly, but the inference contained in words like “inscrutable,” “stubborn,” “tense,” and, above all, “genius,” strongly suggest that media pundits view the Gale Sayers Champion Coach as an odd duck, whose prime redeeming qualities are, in this order, his Gale Sayers ring, his overall record, and his tenure as coach. The answer, of course, is “no,” but his fudging of injury reports and his explanations for it *post facto* are at the center of concern that the only coach Durham has ever had is entering a Rain Man-like state, where his calculations of the maximum stress-load of his players are based on some kind of autistic fantasy, or pure psychotic delusion, far from reality. Keeping a healthy **Cooper Kupp** on the sideline while his team loses to Scarborough is just, well, both weird and self-destructive.

Third: *Are Budapest’s expensive free agents paying off?* A full season will reveal the answer, but so far it is looking like the return on investment in **Stefon Diggs** (\$15 million) and **Cameron Jordan** (\$10 million) is less than shareholders hoped for. Diggs is

tied for 24th in receptions, with 37 – not bad when one considers *Justin Jefferson* soaks up most of the targets – but averages just 10.6 yards per catch, with four touchdowns. These are still very good numbers, but when the highest paid receiver in the league has 26 others either equal to, or in front of him, and he is not absorbing *all* his opponent's double teams, the value of his contract is dubitable. Jordan is proving to be an average edge rusher at this point in his career. He is tied with dozens at 26th in sacks, with 3, and is tied at 24th with five others in tackles for loss, with 5. He has been on the field for 60% of defensive snaps, showing that his durability is waning. Jordan is not impacting the field in proportion to his salary, but it is fair to say that without him, the North Stars' defence would come close to crumbling, as there is nobody to replace him. So, Jordan is not being paid to produce as much as he is to prevent a defensive collapse. This is not the best reason to spend \$10 million.

Fourth: *Can the Thunder Lizards' rookie corners handle the two best wide receivers in the league?* The answer was “unlikely,” but not “no.” *Christian Gonzalez* was picked with the no.3 overall pick and *Devon Witherspoon* with the no.6 overall pick in the draft. Both blue chip prospects, the expectation was that they would come into the league as ready-made, excellent cornerbacks. They have not disappointed in that regard. They have 5 interceptions between them already. Gonzalez is proving to be merely average in coverage, above average in play-making skill, while Witherspoon is looking as good, if not better, than advertised, with 3 interceptions, one forced fumble, and defending at a 59% completion rate. While this speaks to a great prospect draft haul, it does not necessarily follow that these rookies would continue such effectiveness against two of the top elite receivers in the league. Personally, I was not expecting these two blue-chippers to neutralize the two rooks of the Budapest offence, but I was interested in how they fared.

Let's try to answer the above questions based on the outcome of the Week Eight showdown between the historically best teams in the Atlantic Conference – a game where no player or coach on either team gets a pass.

The game started badly for the home team. An initial boost from stopping the North Stars on their opening drive was wiped out by a Durham three-and-out from their own one-yard line followed by a punt from the back of the end zone that Budapest returner *Kalif Raymond* returned 46 yards to the house. Over-pursuit on special teams set the stage and Raymond's initial double-cut did the rest. No Lizard managed to get a claw on him. I bet nobody bet that the first points in this game would come from a punt return. When games start this way, all bets are off.

The somber mood in Jurassic Park turned to depression when corner, *Cameron Sutton* intercepted *Josh Allen* on the Lizards' next possession and returned it 26 yards to the Durham 30. *Cordarrell Patterson* cashed in the turnover with a 4-yard touchdown run off left tackle to cap a seven-play drive consisting entirely of running plays. The extra point made it 14-0 for Budapest less than ten minutes into the game. The Thunder Lizards, for all their talent and skill, were in danger of getting buried early, which would be a disaster for broadcaster, *ESPN*.

Knowing their role in such situations, the officials stepped in to nudge the game in a more competitive direction. A penalty-filled third Durham possession brought up 4th & 14 at their own 17-yard line. Budapest was about to get the ball back in good field position once more, at their own 39, but Jordan was called for being offside on the play, giving the Lizards a chance to push them back further. The second punt sailed farther and higher, prompting a fair catch by Raymond at his own 24, but hold on! There was a flag back behind the line of scrimmage, where punter *Drue Chrisman* had fallen after being contacted by defensive tackle, *Tim Settle*. Roughing the kicker was the call, giving Durham a second life.

The camera panned to an enraged *Darrin Jones* on the Budapest sideline. Settle, not a limber or agile specimen, a run-stopper by trade, was not the player one would expect to penetrate the line and come close to blocking a punt. On replay it could be seen that Settle was turned sideways by an awkward double-team by guard *Quinn Meinerz* and long-snapper, *Liam McCullough*, who came in late after snapping the ball and appeared to knock an off-balance Settle in the direction of the punter. To top it off, Chrisman had taken an extra step forward on the punt, putting him closer to the line than expected. Settle did contact him fully, but it did not look intentional. Watch the replay, and you be the judge.

In any case, the 15 yards and automatic first down gave the Lizards new life and they took advantage. Facing 3rd & 10 at their own 37, Allen took matters into his own legs, evading strong pressure from the Budapest line and finding open space past the line of scrimmage and well into the Budapest secondary. He slid at the Budapest 32-yard line after gaining 31 yards, causing an explosion of applause from the desperate Durham fans. This is the kind of play that few quarterbacks in this league can make and when it's made, it dramatically changes the momentum.

With the Budapest defence winded and on its heels, Allen made two snappy completions, the second to a wide-open *Darren Waller* near the sideline for an 18-yard touchdown pass. With 1:56 left to play in the 1st quarter, Durham was on the board and back in the game. This was the start of a rapidly dynamic back-and-forth between the combatants, as the field tilted toward the home team. The Durham defence slammed the door, three-and-out, on the North Stars to follow up their offence's score, then recharged their batteries on the sideline through the period change as the offence charged back up the field, Allen dealing dimes to *Marquez Valdes-Scantling*, *Curtis Samuel* and a 25-yard cross to *Dawson Knox* – eight pass attempts in a row, completing five, to arrive at the Budapest 10-yard line. On the ninth play of the drive, Allen bulled forward through the middle of the Budapest line behind center *David Andrews*, past surprised linebackers and into the end zone, untouched.

“Allen takes it himself...and he's in for the touchdown!” trumpeted *ESPN* play-by-play announcer, *Joe Duck*. “And just like that, the Thunder Lizards are about to tie this game.”

“Josh Allen made that look so easy,” raved colour commentator, *Troy Acheman*. “Just the slightest bit of hesitation to let the Budapest pass rush launch itself then bowls forward like a giant bull. Nobody touches him. It's like he's a cheat code!”



Violators linebacker **Matt Judon** celebrates in his own way as **Fletcher Cox** looks on approvingly after sacking **Daniel Jones** in third quarter action in Virden this week. Judon finished with 12 tackles, 2 sacks, 2 run stuffs and a forced fumble to lead the Violators to a 24-3 win over New Jersey. Suddenly, all the talk in Virden is revolving around a defensive squad emerging as the most elite in the EFL.

Having a quarterback like Allen, when he is on his game, makes up for a lot of flaws in execution and scheme, and can create undefendable scenarios, like the one that just transpired. Allen was able to suddenly and effectively switch gears at the perfect moment after forcing the North Stars into a defensive posture of his choosing, making them ripe for the power dive up the middle. Unfortunately, Allen could do nothing about **Cade York** hitting the upright on the extra point attempt. As a result, although each team had found the end zone twice, Budapest held a slim 14-13 lead.

Rodgers calmly countered with five completions in five attempts, four of those to Jefferson, to bring the North Stars to the Durham 6-yard line. But on 3rd & goal at the 5, Durham's **Chandler Jones** came through on the blitz and dropped Rodgers for a loss before he could switch to his second read. **Nick Folk** made true on the 28-yard field goal to make it 17-13 for Budapest.

Undaunted by the field goal and lifted by the third down sack that forced it, the Durham offence went for broke on this first play, but Valdes-Scantling was well-covered deep downfield and Allen's check down to **Tyler Allgeier** was smothered by **Frankie Luvu**. Allgeier was stuffed for a loss on the next play by **Sam Williams**, setting up 3rd & 11. The North Stars had a shot at forcing a three-and-out and stifling Durham's momentum before the half. They rushed two and sat back in coverage, with **Jonathan Cooper** keeping a keen eye on Allen as he scurried around in the backfield. Unable to find an open man Allen pulled the ball down and started to run, drawing Cooper and half the defensive backfield toward him like a moth to a flame. But just before he reached the line of scrimmage, he flicked his wrist and sent the ball more than 40 yards down field to a wide-open Knox, who had found a hole in the broken-down coverage. He hauled in the pass and was soon tackled by the deep safety, **Tashaun Gipson**, at the Budapest 28-yard line for a 48-yard gain. It was another back-breaking play for the Budapest defence. Four plays later, Allen bought more time with his legs and checked down to Allgeier for an 11-yard touchdown. This time, York made the extra point, giving Durham a 20-17 lead.

With three minutes remaining in the half, the North Stars were in position to tie or regain the lead before halftime. This would be important, as the Thunder Lizards would get the ball to start the half, in a position to draw first blood after their halftime adjustments. The tension was high, and it showed when **George Kittle** jumped off the line early for a false start penalty. Five yards was something the North Stars' offence could overcome. What they could not overcome was what happened next. Rodgers checked down to **Raheem Mostert**, who was drilled immediately by linebacker **Cody Barton**. Surprisingly, Mostert withstood the blow and attempted to break the tackle, but as he was wrapping up the ball-carrier, Barton delivered a right hook to the football, knocking it loose. **Tyrann Mathieu** jumped on it, giving Durham the ball in great field position at the Budapest 31.

Already in field goal range, and not wanting to give the North Stars any more time before the half, Durham kept the ball on the ground, chewing up yards and clock until they reached the 14 with 0:17 left. From there, they took one shot at the end zone, but the coverage was excellent. Allen was forced to scramble but came up three yards short of the first down. **Cairo Santos** came on to boot the 24-yard field goal with no time remaining, giving the home team a 23-17 lead heading into the locker room.

“No doubt about that one, and Cairo Santos gives Durham a six-point lead,” announced **Joe Duck** as the ball sailed through the uprights. “That was a conservative series by Durham, but they take advantage of the turnover to extend their lead.”

“There are two ways to look at that sequence,” **Troy Acheman** weighed in. “You want to score a touchdown there, but you don’t really want Budapest getting the ball back with too much time before the half. The North Stars looked like they were expecting Durham to be aggressive, but Coach Kaldis bided his time until he was in position to take a safe shot at the end zone. Did he wait a play or two too long before going to the air? I probably would have taken my shot sooner – on second down. But in the end, they got points off the turnover and they get the ball back to start the second half. They must like their position.”

The sellout crowd of over 61,000 at Jurassic Park agreed. The fans were in a boisterous mood as the teams headed to their locker rooms. A disastrous start was now forgotten, and the momentum was in their team’s corner. The Durham mascot, that genetically engineered, remote-controlled cyborg monstrosity, *Raptorius Blaster*, bounded about the edge of the field, occasionally popping like a giant grasshopper into the stands to terrify fans who were absorbed by their cellphones, causing fits of laughter from the crowd. It ended its performance by loping to the center of field and expelling a primal roar that filled the stadium, causing both thrill and dread. As terrible as this sound was, especially to the very young and elderly, the Durham mascot’s antics had been toned down recently following complaints and at least one lawsuit from a fan who had suffered a mild heart attack after *Raptorius Blaster* had playfully engulfed the fan’s head in its jaws. Designers of *Raptorius* insisted that there was no possibility of the mascot malfunctioning, but nobody who had ever had their head inside that giant dinosaur maw for even a second could be 100% certain that it would not snap down suddenly and sever their head from their shoulders. Still, everyone marvelled at the unmatched technological complexity of such a creature, or thing.

The second half started slowly, with Durham’s opening drive stalling just past mid-field and Budapest replying with a punt from their own 44-yard line. Both teams were being cautious offensively. Durham took over at their own 18-yard line, looking to break the stalemate and extend their lead. They got the spark they were looking for when Allen lofted a bomb to Valdes-Scantling, who pulled it in for a 44-yard gain into Budapest territory. With the North Stars’ secondary now stretched out, Allen came back with a short slant to Samuel for a 23-yard snatch-and-run touchdown pass. With the extra point, Durham now led 30-17, with just four minutes remaining in the third quarter. The fans in Jurassic Park erupted in celebration. The Durham defence had been far from shutdown this year, due to a leaky run defence, but they continued to be difficult to pass against. They had the North Stars where they wanted them in terms of limiting their play selection. It was now a matter of closing them out.

Budapest coach, **Darrin Jones** simmered on the sideline. Was he blocking out memories of last year’s quarter final loss to Durham, a game where his quarterback had failed to throw a touchdown and had been picked off twice? Or was he dwelling on that last appearance, calculating how he was going to crack the Durham nut differently on this occasion? The camera caught him beckoning for Rodgers, who came to his side. Jones seemed to then angrily berate his quarterback. Was he really angry, or just attempting to fire him up? Neither Jones nor Rodgers would speak about it after the game and, so far, the field mic version of the video has not surfaced. But there was some type of unusual communication in that moment, and it may have been the catalyst for what followed.

Starting at his own 25, Rodgers led the North Stars unwaveringly up the field, dropping back on almost every play and reading the Durham secondary with an eagle eye. On one long-developing pattern, facing a strong rush, he saw the wide-open middle of the field inviting him and he accepted the invitation, scrambling for 18 yards and sliding down at the Durham 41. Two consecutive false start penalties induced by a noxious mix of crowd noise and nerves, pushed them back 10 yards, but Rodgers got it back and more with a perfectly placed long pass to Diggs, who had found a gap in the zone, for a 30-yard completion to the Durham 21. Yet another false start set them back again, but Rodgers just ignored the adversity and, four plays later, found Jefferson in the back of the end zone for a 10-yard touchdown strike as time expired in the third quarter. The Durham lead had shrunk to 30-24 and the stadium was not as noisy.

Durham started the fourth quarter with possession at their own 31 after a 30-yard kick return by **Tyler Scott**. They mounted a solid drive that eventually stalled at the Budapest 22 when Allen was stopped by **Harrison Phillips** three yards short on 3rd & 6.

“Allen takes it himself...and he’s not going to get it, Harrison Phillips wraps him up well short of the first down marker,” declared **Joe Duck** as Allen picked himself off the thick, prehistoric grass of Jurassic Park. “And George Kaldis is sending on the field goal unit to try and make it a two-score game.”

“Well, it looks like they may have been playing for a field goal there, Joe,” commented **Troy Acheman**. “A bit of an unusual play call in that situation, but that same play went for a 10-yard touchdown earlier in the game and you can count on the North Stars playing the pass there, which they did. But Harrison Phillips recognizes it right away and holds his lane, sliding to his left to make the tackle. The fans want them to go for it here on fourth down, but I think this is the right call to try a field goal here.”

Santos made it look easy with a kick down the center, prompting polite applause from a crowd evenly mixed between those who appreciated the strategy and those who wanted their coach to be aggressive and go for something more. We will never know what might have happened if the Lizards had been less conservative, but regardless, the North Stars were now going to have to find two scores in the game’s final nine minutes and 52 seconds.

They got one of those scores in short order. After chipping his way to his opponent’s 42, Rodgers tried to stretch the field once more with a long pass to Diggs. Showing great anticipation, the safety Mathieu came over and leaped to bat the ball away. But his jump was a fraction of a second early and he contacted Diggs just before the arrival of the ball, resulting in a pass interference call that put the ball on the Durham 26. The crowd rained boos down on the field as Rodgers wasted little time getting under center. He dropped back, with good protection, and without hesitation fired a long pass to Diggs, who had half a step on the rookie corner Witherspoon. He snared the ball as it arrived a half-foot behind, allowing Witherspoon to close the gap and deliver a hit as the ball arrived. But Diggs

hung on then slipped away as the Durham corner slid to the ground, sprinting the remaining 10 yards for the touchdown.

“Touchdown, Budapest!” cried **Joe Duck**, as Diggs circled the end zone and flipped the ball through the goal posts. “Stefon Diggs with the tough catch, brings it home and brings the North Stars to within at least a field goal, pending the extra point.”

“Rodgers doesn’t hesitate to throw this ball here, but it is a bit off target, forcing Diggs to make an adjustment,” commented **Troy Acheman** as the reply ran on screen. “I don’t know how he hung on to this ball with Witherspoon delivering the hit that he did, let alone stay upright and finish it off for a touchdown. Just an amazing play by Diggs!”

The extra point was good, casting a momentary pall over the home crowd. Durham’s lead had shrunk to 2 points, 33-31 and there remained over seven minutes to play. Although still trailing, the momentum was shifting firmly in the direction of the visitors and the pressure was now on the Thunder Lizards to generate points, or risk giving the ball back to Rodgers with less than a field goal lead.

The Durham response did not start well and ended worse. Meinerz was flagged for a false start before the first play. Then, on 3rd & 11, Allen did the one thing his coach likely secretly feared he would do – he tried to “make a play” when it wasn’t there to be made. With the secondary swarming with defenders, Allen tried to thread the needle to Samuel and watched as **Jamel Dean** picked off the pass, returning it 16 yards to the Durham 22-yard line. Three plays later, with the frustrated Durham defence coming on a rare two-man blitz, Rodgers lofted a quick pass to the back shoulder of Diggs, who brought it in at the pylon for a touchdown.

“Back shoulder pass to Diggs...he’s got it! Is he in? The official is signalling touchdown. It’s a touchdown!” **Joe Duck** blared.

“What a throw by Rodgers and what a catch by Diggs!” **Troy Acheman** observed. “Rodgers sees the blitz coming and audibles out to Diggs and it’s just executed to perfection. No man coverage is going to beat that pass when it’s executed like that. There’s an example of two veterans, who have been to war together, being on the same page at a crucial moment in the game.”

The two-point convert failed but that was little solace to the Durham fans. They were now trailing by four, 37-33, and would need a touchdown or two field goals to get back in front. There was still plenty of time, over five minutes, but they knew that they could not risk trying to cover this in two possessions – not against Rodgers. They would have to do it on this drive or fall into dire straits.

The Thunder Lizard drive that ensued was designed to be a one-man show by Allen. When he wasn’t passing the ball, he was running it himself. The strategy worked well, and it brought them to the Budapest 34 with a fresh set of downs and 1:55 remaining. They were now all-in on this possession, but they controlled their own destiny. They could cement the game if they could draw out the clock while also covering the remaining 34 yards to the end zone. The crowd was energized and optimistic. This wasn’t the Budapest defence of two years ago. They stood in anticipation, raptor tail-shaped pennants waving in the air. And then...disaster...

“Allen back to pass...complete to Homer...tackled by Luvu...and the ball’s out!” yelled **Joe Duck**. “Wonnnum jumps on it! The officials are signalling Budapest ball. Oh my, what a turn of events here in Durham!”

“Well, Durham has all of their timeouts left, so it’s not the end yet, but even if they get the ball back, they will not have much time and probably a lot of distance to cover,” **Troy Acheman** added somberly. “They target Travis Homer on this play, Joe, and he’s a deep back-up on their roster. That was just his third offensive snap of the season, and you have to wonder why he’s in there in such a key moment in the game. He runs a good route here, but he looks unprepared for the closing speed of Frankie Luvu and he just doesn’t have a great grip on the ball. That’s a costly turnover, one that will likely cost them the game.”

The Thunder Lizards never got the ball back. The North Stars closed out the game with one final pass completion by Rodgers and a pair of kneel downs by their back-up quarterback, **Bryce Perkins**. Jurassic Park emptied quietly as **Darrin Jones** and his players celebrated briefly before engaging in the post-game on-field ritual with their defeated opponent. A tense-looking **George Kaldis** gave his opposite number a perfunctory handshake and marched off the field with characteristic quick, short strides. There would be many tough questions for him after this game, and he knew it.

As for the bigger questions posed by the football world in the lead-up to this game, let’s try to answer them now:

- 1) *Is Aaron Rodgers washed up?* A: No, absolutely not. In fact, this game may have woken him up for the rest of the season.
- 2) *Is Durham coach, George Kaldis losing it?* A: No, at least not completely. Everyone who was healthy played, his game plan was sound, if a bit conservative. But one must wonder what special formula, computer algorithm, or Ouija board prompted him to insert **Travis Homer** into the game and make him the primary target in such a pressure-filled moment.
- 3) *Are Budapest’s expensive free agents paying off?* A: Still too early to say. If **Stefon Diggs** keeps delivering in key moments against topflight opponents as he did in this game, his insane salary will be justifiable.
- 4) *Can the Thunder Lizards’ rookie corners handle the two best wide receivers in the league?* A: No. **Justin Jefferson** and **Stefon Diggs** were targeted 24 times, catching 18 balls for 234 yards and 3 TDs. That’s a passer rating of **144.8**. Neither rookie was credited with a pass defended. It wasn’t all their fault; sometimes the scheme was disadvantageous, sometimes the pass rush didn’t get home. But in the end, they played the role many a lower draft pick could have played just as easily.

Needless to say, this was a clutch win for the North Stars who, at 6-2, are already two games behind the indomitable Spartans in their division. The Thunder Lizards remain a game ahead of Cowtown and likely will not have to work very hard to win their division. In that sense, this was a loss they could afford. But the psychological impact of seeing firsthand that the North Stars are regaining their former strength, may end up being a factor if these two teams meet again in the post-season.

AROUND THE EFL

There were several competitive games this week, but apart from the Budapest win, no outright upsets. In fact, this was one of the more predictable weeks the league has seen so far. With my report card taking up all my attention, I will breeze through the other games:

At **TERRODOME** in Virden, the game intended to be the Pacific Conference’s answer to Budapest-Durham unfolded slowly, but

inexorably in the home team's favour, as the Violators suffocated the Wrecking Balls, 24-3. Faint hope that New Jersey QB, **Daniel Jones** would retain his road game mastery against the league's no.1 ranked defence dissipated gradually as the Wrecking Balls' offence ran smack dab into a wall created by pro bowl linebackers, **C.J. Mosley** and **Matt Judon**, who combined for 22 tackles. Judon stood out, with 12 tackles, 2 sacks, 2 run stuffs, and a forced fumble and recovery that ended all hope of a New Jersey comeback. **Patrick Mahomes** got his 3 touchdown passes and threw his obligatory interception trying to make something out of nothing, but the focus shifted away from him and onto the Virden defence as the key factor in the game. In fact, the Virden defence is becoming a story in recent weeks, as they continue to dominate since an opening day slip in which they surrendered 27 points. No team has scored more than 17 on them since.

At Wilhalla Stadium in Minneapolis, the Triumph resorted to a "Hail Mary" kickoff return for a TD by **Devin Duvernay** with 1:31 left to escape with a 34-30 win over the improving, but still somewhat mangy Coyotes. Earlier in the quarter, Cobb County had tied the game at 27 on a 91-yard punt return for a TD by **Montrell Washington**, and then taken the lead on a 49-yard **Jake Moody** field goal. It was shaping up to be another signature win for the wild dogs after they had trailed at halftime, 20-7, until their special teams broke down against the speed of Duvernay. The Triumph were slowed down by 10 penalties. It was noted by critics that rookie no.1 overall pick **Bryce Young** threw for 260 yards and 2 touchdowns, but also completed less than 50% of his pass attempts and threw a costly interception that **Jaire Alexander** returned for a touchdown. It was a step backward for Young after two steps forward in the previous two weeks.

At True North Field in Peg City, the Crusaders tendered the first, definitive proof that they are for real with a 24-17 defeat of Bruxelles. **Ryan Tannehill** threw 2 touchdown passes and moved the chains when needed to spearhead the attack, while the Peg City defenders kept **Justin Fields** in check through the air, while giving up 98 yards and 2 touchdowns to him on the ground. What matters is that they turned away the Bombers' quarterback on all three of Bruxelles' 4th quarter possessions to preserve the win.

At Kingdome in Seattle, the Cubs evened their record with an explosive 45-38 win over the Pilots. **Derek Carr** completed only 14 passes, but 5 of those were for touchdowns, 3 to the dynamically dangerous **A.J. Brown** and a thrilling 75-yard strike to **Josh Palmer**. At 23.3 yards per catch and 11 touchdown receptions, Brown would seem to be the league's greatest deep-strike threat. Incredibly, he has competition in Georgia's **Amari Cooper**, who also has 11 touchdown receptions and averages 23.5 yards per catch. The side story of this game was Seattle breaking out of a 10-quarter scoring drought with 377 yards and 38 points. **Trey Lance** got the start but was pulled out of the game for some reason after Seattle fell behind 17-7. **Carson Wentz** carried on, with 54 pass attempts for 299 yards and 4 TDs. These numbers are ones you will never see again from Seattle until the next time they face the league's most incompetent defence.

At Tillman Field in Cowtown, the powerful Spartans continued their perfect run with a 31-19 win over the Corn Kings that was not as comfortable as the score suggests. In fact, Cowtown had a 19-17 late in the 3rd quarter that was finally overcome by a 10-yard, broken tackle check-down TD pass from **Jalen Hurts** to **D'Andre Swift**. The opportunity had been set up earlier by a 3rd & 11 sideline pass to **George Pickens** that went for 50 yards in the game's pivotal offensive play. **Kaden Elliss** finished off the win with a strip-sack of **Jimmy Garoppolo** that **Kyle Dugger** picked up and ran back 55 yards for a dramatic game-sealing touchdown.

At Hawkeye Park in Brooklin, the Hawks counted 15 points in the final six minutes of the game to prevail over the Swordfish, 43-29. **Geno Smith** came through in the clutch with 4th quarter TD passes of 42 yards to **Evan Engram** and 46 yards to **Drake London**, to finish with 5 TD passes on the day. London snared 4 of those to earn Offensive Player of the Week. The win is second the straight for 3-5 Brooklin as they look to rebound from a 1-5 start. Granted, two of their three wins have come against the dregs of the league, but a comeback must start somewhere and if it isn't coming against the Swordfish, it's never coming at all.

At Camelot in Avalon, York Region, the Excaliburs rode **King Henry** to a 28-20 win over the flightless Blue Eagles. Henry was the beginning and end of this story, carrying the ball 36 times for 216 yards and 3 touchdowns, all of them coming from 2 yards away. The fourth York TD was also scored from 2 yards away, by sparsely used fullback **Michael Burton**, while Henry was taking a breather.

At Veteran Field in Williamsport, the Convicts ruined 'Bat Day' in Billtown by prevailing over their "rival," 28-23. All attendees at the game received a stuffed bat and a black cape to wear. When one fan started to shake out the cape like it was a bed sheet, others followed suit and suddenly there were thousands of black capes waving in the wind, creating an eerie effect (check it out on *TokTik*) that seemed to inspire the Bats' players. Despite a Herculean effort from **Justin Herbert** (348 yards, 2 TDs, 0 INTs), his opponent **Jared Goff** got the better of him, throwing 3 TD passes, including a 25-yarder to rookie **Zay Flowers** for the game-winner in the 4th.

At Kelly-Burke Field in Erieau, the Braves rebounded from their tough loss to Bruxelles to chop down on the Cadillac, 34-10. **C.J. Stroud** completed 14 of 15 passes for 232 yards and 3 TDs to three different receivers, while **Jahmyr Gibbs** and **Joe Mixon** provided the distraction with 37 carries for 205 yards and 2 touchdowns. Five touchdowns against the Caddies' defence should be impressive, but the lethargy that has overcome the Erieau offence under the transgendered **Kyler Murray** seems to have now infected the defence as well, which struggles to stop the run, allows receivers to run free and crumples too often in the red zone. It is not the same defence as last year, despite having many of the same faces. Is yet another coaching change on the horizon in Erieau? Or are they tanking for a QB?

At Monsignor McClancy Memorial Stadium in Queen's, the second half turned ugly for the home team as they fell to the volcanically hot, **Tua Tagovailoa** and the Glads, 49-28. After playing Georgia to a 21-21 draw over 30 minutes, the Irish passing attack under **Sam Darnold** stopped producing, while Tua continued to slice and dice the East Elmhurst secondary. In the end, Tua threw for 378 yards and 4 TDs, 3 to **Amari Cooper**, while Darnold matched him with 4 TDs on 426 yards, but also threw an interception. The teams combined for over 1,000 yards of offence and 57 first downs.

And finally, at Patriot Place in Charleswood, the Lamar Jacksons pushed by the Patriots, 27-24, for their second win. **Lamar** completed 25 of 30 passes for 175 yards and 3 TDs and rushed for 126 yards. He was the Buffalo offence, as usual. The Derailer defence almost let the Patriots sneak back into the game but forced a fumble by **Antonio Gibson** with 1:01 left to preserve the win.



Professor McChad's Mid-Term Report Card

November 2023

In the Hallowed Halls of High Learning in the Living Football University called the EFL only the strictest standards apply. As a Senior Fellow of said EFL University it falls on me to maintain those standards by applying rigour to my grades. No team is spared the most exacting analysis and criticism based on my profound and every-increasing knowledge of this wonderful sport. For the sake of the sport, I spare no one. But if you meet or exceed the standard, you will be recognized and, in rare cases, praised. Here is my rating scale:

A: Excellent **B: Good** **C: Fair** **D: Poor** **F: Fail**

A plus (+) indicates slightly above the grade; a minus (-) slightly less.

Billtown (E+): First in the alphabet and last in football accomplishment, the Bats are currently ranked at no.24 in the AP Power Rankings. You can't get any lower, which means reputedly worse teams, like Seattle and Buffalo, are considered above them. This is a well-deserved ranking for more than just the bad play on the field. The team has transformed itself from a contender to a "surrender" overnight by gutting its roster voluntarily in the hope of some vague future glory. Well, it stinks!

Brooklin (C): The Hawks get consideration for being in the toughest division in the Atlantic Conference, but the signs so far are they are less of a threat with Geno Smith under center than with Derek Carr – at least against the better teams. After a 1-5 start, the team is trending in the right direction, albeit the recent improvement has come against bad teams. The question is: What are reasonable expectations for this team? I think the coach thought they'd be much better, and so far he has been wrong.

Bruxelles (A-): Before the start of the season, one would have been hard-pressed to find a Bombers fan who would not have been happy with 6 wins in the first 8 weeks. After a red-hot 5-0 start, recency bias toward the relative struggles of the last three weeks risks distorting the picture of how well this team has performed. While Justin Fields gets the lion's share of the praise, the credible showing of the ageing and downgraded defence is a hidden and vital factor, which is a credit to the coach.

Budapest (B+): Same record as Bruxelles; not the same expectations. With the expensive return of Stefon Diggs for another go at the title, it was anticipated that the North Stars would ride a wave of offence in a neck-and-neck race with Pickering in the Coastal Division. Instead, it has until recently been the defence that has kept them from tumbling further down the hill in the scramble to keep up with the powerful Spartans. They remain in striking distance but must improve dramatically to recover.

Buffalo (D): I think I've said it a hundred times already, but the Derailers will only go as far as Lamar Jackson can take them. So far, he has brought them two wins, one of them quite impressive. In the other games he has looked overwhelmed. Rightly so, he has few weapons to share the burden of moving the ball and the defence, studded with capable talent, is too often asked to do the impossible and burns out trying. More was expected of this group, and they are falling woefully short.

Charleswood (C-): A loss to Lamar Jackson has tarnished the "best of the worst" image the Pats were building. They don't have much talent and predictably have not upset a good team, but they have been surprisingly resilient in lost causes and have shown the guts to follow through to victory against teams in their wheelhouse...except for Buffalo. The secondary, bad as it is, could be playing much worse. Perhaps all this is an indication that playing in the league's best division has residual benefits.

Chino (B+): The Convicts are flirting with an A-grade with this record, but two bad losses and hard-effort wins against dregs like Billtown and Charleswood have me doubting they are full value for their six-win start. Nevertheless, as a famous coach in a now defunct league once said, "you are what your record says you are." The problem is, when there are four other six-win teams, you lost badly to one of them, and your six wins have come against losers, common sense says you aren't exactly what your record says you are, rather you are a product of what you and your schedule says you are – the best in a weak division.

Cobb County (C+): I can't decide if the Coyotes are underperforming or overperforming, so I took the middle ground with a mid-grade tilted to the positive. If you consider Bryce Young to be the franchise guy he was touted to be coming out of the draft, then this team is underperforming. If you consider him to be the somewhat over-hyped rookie he appears to be from his play on the field, then the Coyotes are overperforming, especially over the past three weeks. The jury is still out on this squad.

Cowtown (B-): A 500 record is right in line with what most prognosticators projected for this team, but a strong start, showing the propensity to be competitive and win close games, tilted early expectations in an overly optimistic direction. Lately, they have shown a propensity to lose close games, while remaining competitive every week. Certainly, the defence misses T.J. Watt, while the offence could use one more good offensive lineman. It feels like they are almost there, but something is missing.

Durham (B): The Lizards remain a strong team but no longer a dominant one as losses to Viriden and Budapest and a shameful collapse against Scarborough show. The latter was largely attributable to the coach's decision to rest many of his key starters in what was viewed as an easy win, but that is more of an indictment than an excuse. I expect Durham to re-establish themselves in the latter third of the season, but if they continue along the present trajectory, they are at best a one-and-done.

Erieau (D+): This riches-to-rags story is playing out in real time in football's smallest market, so not many people are noticing. But I am. With so much talent on the defensive side and enviable skill players on the offence, it is hard to imagine that this team is regressing, but that is what a stale game plan and poor quarterback play will do. The Caddies were full value for their

division win last year and are full value for their horrendous start this year. Kyler Murray, a sub-par offensive line, and Kyler Murray – did I forget to mention Kyler Murray? – have plunged this squad back into the toilet bowl from whence it came.

East Elmhurst (B+): The Irish are currently the only team contesting Georgia's dominance in the West Division, which is not just a surprise, but a blackmark on the hypothetically more capable teams currently occupying the basement. The team's stars, Micah Parsons and D.K. Metcalf, are playing like stars, while Jacoby Brissett is playing well above expectations. This is enough to put the Irish in the middle rank of teams, for now. It likely won't last, but for now it's a cool story.

Georgia (B): I must be careful not to be overly swayed by the hype around Tua Tagovailoa's pre-season heroics that had the Gladiators billed as top contenders before a single game had been played. It was the pre-season after all, and the Glads are coming off four straight losing seasons and must relearn how to win. Still, the signs of a winner are here, just not apparently a winner against good teams that have a recent history of winning. Georgia is currently in that upper middle class of teams that should win handily over the bottom half but have their hands full against the upper crust. That's good and nothing more.

Iowa City (B+): Setting aside the mystery surrounding the sudden fall from grace of Russell Wilson and the elevation of Derek Carr to semi-permanent starter, the Cubs are performing well above expectations and find themselves the only hope to stop a Chino overrun of the West Division. It is quite incredible that the league's overall worst defence is balanced almost perfectly by the league's most explosive offence. A.J. Brown could very well be a Football God and Carr his High Priest.

LaPlata (C): New coach, new venue, hot young rookie QB versus wily veteran ex-MVP QB, insatiable superstar wide receiver and a gold star defence with zero big play capability – there is a lot going on in the new home of the once great Mustangs franchise. Some thought the change from Oshawa would bring immediate dividends, but football isn't so simple. This is a team still finding its way under new ownership and its too early to say where it is going. To this point, it's been fair.

New Jersey (B-): When one accepts that the Wrecking Balls will always play below expectations, then a record that combines impressive and unimpressive wins with an equal measure of tough and horrible losses seems about par for the course. Nothing really new here in terms of the bottom line, but the way they have gone about it is both interesting and frustrating. Conservatism to a fault on offence has replaced bold Stafford throws over the middle, wasting one of the league's best defences.

Peg City (A-): I want to downgrade the Crusaders a full level for starting Ian Book against the Violators, but the reality is that this team has performed at a full A-grade, except for that one ignoble moment of exceptionally bad judgement. Therefore, I give this group an 'A' with a caveat attached in the form of a "-" for being wusses in the moment of truth. The defence is of exceptional calibre and the offence is improved enough to get the best out of them. This is the prospective top wildcard.

Pickering (A+): The seeds of this dominant season were well-planted and watered in the off-season and now the job of the coaching staff is to nurture that talent to its highest capacity. So far, so very good, as the Spartans are one of two unbeaten teams. They can run the table, as they do not play Virden in inter-conference play and no team in the Atlantic appears their equal, meaning it will take an off-day by them and an on-day by another happening on the same day to break the spell of dominance.

Scarborough (D+): The Blue Eagles earned a "+" with a signature win over Durham, but otherwise have been one of the jokes of the league. This is nothing new, but this year was supposed to be different with the acquisition of Dalvin Cook to take some of the attention off Joe Burrow. In the event, the Scarborough defence turned out to be inadequate, taking Cook out of the game early and putting Burrow's focus on Jahan Dotson, the best of a motley crew at wide receiver. Poor, poor Joe...!

Seattle (D-): A win over Billtown is the only thing holding me back from failing this poor excuse for a football team. The only credit I can give this Pilots crew is that the defence plays every down like a two-minute drill, slowing down the rate at which they lose game, after game. The decision to go with Carson Wentz at quarterback over bidding on a plethora of better free agents is already haunting them and with Trey Lance looking like a bust, this could be a disastrous year, even by their standards.

Sebastian (D-): I am very tempted to go even lower with this grade, but any team that generates an individual record – in this case, Nick Chubb's 252-yard game versus Scarborough – deserves some recognition. There is enough talent on this roster to keep pace in the wishy-washy North Division, but it is not performing remotely close to expectations. Most of this has to do with a weak defence and an overly aggressive offensive posture that promotes turnovers of all kinds. Same old, same old...

Twin Cities (B+): Possibly I am expecting too much from the Triumph in Trevor Lawrence's first season as "The Guy," but though they have six wins and probably deserve an 'A' of some kind, I feel like they just haven't hit their stride yet. They seem to be just getting by. Is Jeff Wilson grabbing enough attention from opposing defences to allow Trevor to blossom into an MVP? His gawdy YPA average suggests otherwise. Until the pass production improves, this is a B-grade contender.

Virden (A+): This grade is easy. If it would not be so overblown, I would add another "+." The no.1 offence and the no.1 defence in the league occupy the same sideline in Virden. Patrick Mahomes is the league's top field general, and he has elite receivers at his command. The defence is fast, built to rush the passer and cover, but has enough pop to stop the run when needed, which isn't often as opponents find themselves behind early. Some quibble about the lack of a committed run game. Who cares?

York (B): I am keeping it simple this year: The Excaliburs are good – nothing more, nothing less. Thinking they are very good, or great, because of Tom Brady and Derrick Henry means one is not looking at the holes. Thinking they are average or mediocre due to lack of depth at skill positions and a mushy linebacker corps means one is not looking at DeForest Buckner and Jordan Poyer. The talent, or lack thereof, blends into B-grade blandness under a coach who is both buffoonish and ingenious.

BUG THE BOOKIE!

JIMMY THE GEEK GIVES YOU HIS PICKS
FOR WEEK NINE EFL ACTION

Your source for fantasy and on-line betting solutions



RECORD VS THE SPREAD AFTER WEEK 8:

54-38-4

Jimmy's WEEK NINE PICKS

NEW JERSEY @ CHINO (line – CONVICTS by 4)

INJURIES: New Jersey – Chidobe Awuzie (OUT), David Bakhtiari (OUT), Antoine Winfield Jr., (OUT); **Chino** – Eddie Jackson (OUT).

New Jersey has the highest pass completion rate in the league yet finds itself mired in offensive inefficiency, ranked near the bottom in yards gained and points scored. It's a strange dichotomy, but explainable by the team's league-worst yards per completion, which is attributable to a game plan that refuses to attempt to stretch the field. According the *StatsGraph*, Daniel Jones has attempted only 5 passes in the 16–20-yard range and 1 in the 21-25-yard range all year. This is not overlooked by opposing defences, who are not afraid to crowd the line or cheat in, thus suffocating the entire offence, including the run game. What I am saying in a roundabout way is that the Wrecking Balls defence will have to win this one, going up against a run-of-the-mill Chino attack. Based on their valiant showing in a loss to Virden last week, I think they have a chance on the road, where Jones is more comfortable. **PICK: NEW JERSEY**

IOWA CITY @ BUFFALO (line – CUBS by 4)

INJURIES: Iowa City – Amani Hooker (OUT), Joe Noteboom (OUT), Tyron Smith (OUT); **Buffalo** – Aaron Donald (PROBABLE), Donte Jackson (OUT), Wan'Dale Robinson (OUT).

“Superman” showed up for the Derailers in their road win over the Patriots. Lamar was accurate in the short passing game and explosive with his legs, breaking a 74-yard run for the team's longest play of the season to set up an early score. Buffalo needs this kind of performance from Jackson every week to stand a chance and the defence needs to take the ball away more to win. Fortunately, this week they face a Cubs defence that is every bit as poor as advertised, coming off a win in which they surrendered 38 points to a Seattle offence that had scored less than that in their previous five games combined. The Cubs are still in the playoff hunt because of their quick strike offence, led by dreaded combo of Derek Carr and A.J. Brown. Carr is letting it loose, seemingly unconcerned about throwing picks knowing the payoff if Brown gets his hands on the ball. Expect the aerial circus to continue. **PICK: IOWA CITY**

BRUXELLES @ BILLTOWN (line – BOMBERS by 10)

INJURIES: Bruxelles – Jack Campbell (DOUBTFUL); **Billtown** – Jordan Fuller (OUT), Mecole Hardman (OUT), Shaquille Leonard (OUT), Marcus Williams (OUT).

The Diviners of the Dust Bowl really love the Bombers this year, having favoured them in every game so far, save for a sole “pick'em” versus the Glads in Week Four. Several of the lines have been quite large for such an early point in the season, including this one on the road against the seemingly moribund Bats. But the Bombers are showing signs of wear offensively, with Justin Fields' aerial production dropping off the past three weeks, over which period they have dropped two games and barely squeezed by LaPorta. As bad as the Bats have been, I don't detect that they are ready to give up just yet. Incompetent as they are, they gave Chino a game last week in another loss. I still don't see them winning here, but I see a close game unfolding. **PICK: BILLTOWN**

SEATTLE @ COBB COUNTY (line – COYOTES by 10)

INJURIES: Seattle – Marshon Lattimore (OUT), Trey Sermon (OUT), Ar'Darius Washington (IR); **Cobb County** – Brandon Jones (PROBABLE), Jamal Adams (IR), Brian Allen (OUT), Payton Turner (OUT), Tre'Davious White (OUT).

I almost spit out my morning coffee when I saw this line. It was a reflexive response to the very idea that the Coyotes would be favoured by double digits against anybody. Upon further reflection, however, it is true that they are improving steadily from week to week. They showed up against the Triumph in a loss that boiled down to one bad decision by their rookie quarterback and a colossal

special teams breakdown in the final minute. The Pilots broke out offensively against the Cubs last week, but the Coyotes' defence is several cuts above, and I guarantee that won't happen again here. The big line makes me a bit nervous all the same. **PICK: SEATTLE**

VIRDEN @ CHARLESWOOD (line – VIOLATORS by 14)

INJURIES: Virden – D.J. Humphries (OUT), Leonard Williams (OUT); **Charleswood** – De'Vondre Campbell (OUT), Lloyd Cushenberry (OUT), Ronald Darby (OUT), Paris Johnson Jr. (OUT), David Ojabo (OUT).

This old Manitoba rivalry can result in closer games than expected, regardless of where each team sits on the spectrum of competitiveness coming in. While I want to think this rivalry can again engender a great effort by the underdog to defy the odds, I think the chance of the Pats turning this into a field goal win for either team in the final seconds is close to nil. Sure, Patrick Mahomes looked human against the Wrecking Balls last week, but in the end, he still delivered the necessary death blows. While that was happening, the Pats were losing to the Derailers, a stain upon even them. The Violators are simply on another plane of existence now and the Pats have nothing to challenge them with. It is quite possible they will not score and likely they will not crack double digits. **PICK: VIRDEN**

PEG CITY @ TWIN CITIES (line – TRIUMPH by 4)

INJURIES: Peg City – Cody Whitehair (PROBABLE); **Twin Cities** – Emmanuel Moseley (OUT), Derek Stingley Jr. (OUT).

This crucial mid-season battle of the "cities" will likely come down to which quarterback will make the decisive play, or set of plays, to break what on paper is an even match-up. The Crusaders have the league's most efficient defence against the run and the Triumph rely significantly on the run to set the table for Trevor Lawrence. The training wheels are finally off for Lawrence, and he is proving to be the calibre of quarterback that still needs help and cannot do it alone with his arm. This puts him in a similar category as his opponent, Ryan Tannehill, who needs the run game a little less but still cannot be exposed for long to a pass-only scenario without serious risk. Expect a defensive battle, with the potential for an offensive breakthrough resting with the more confident, experienced QB. **PICK: PEG CITY**

COWTOWN @ ERIEAU (line – CORN KINGS by 2)

INJURIES: Cowtown – Xavier Woods (DOUBTFUL), Michael Pierce (OUT), TJ Watt (OUT); **Erieau** – Mark Andrews (DOUBTFUL), Joey Bosa (OUT), Aaron Robinson (IR).

Both squads enter carrying the burden of three-game losing streaks. For the visitors, their slide came against quality competition, most recently a good but losing effort against the undefeated Spartans. The Caddies have been flummoxed by strong defences combined with poor quarterback play. Kyler Murray played passably in their loss to LaPlata last week but found what little success he had in garbage time. It is fair to say that the quarterback problem in Erieau has developed into a crisis. Unexpectedly, a similar discontent in quarterback play has arisen in Cowtown, resulting in the mid-week decision to name Andy Dalton the starting quarterback for this game. Coincidentally, the last time Dalton started in this league was against Erieau back in 2019, when Dalton played for the Thunder Lizards. That game did not go well. I expect a change of scenery, and a struggling Erieau squad, will help him here. **PICK: COWTOWN**

SEBASTIAN @ GEORGIA (line – GLADIATORS by 16)

INJURIES: Sebastian – Divine Deablo (OUT), Austin Johnson (OUT), Marlon Tuipulotu (OUT); **Georgia** – D.J. Jones (DOUBTFUL), Nick McCloud (OUT).

The problems in Sebastian have reached "curse" level. Even when they play competitively and avoid the overly aggressive coaching decisions, they find a way to fall, as they did to the Hawks. The Glads are back in high gear offensively under a non-concussed Tua Tagovailoa, who has thrown 8 touchdown passes in the last two games. The overworked Swordfish defence looks ripe for the picking, thus the highest two-score line available favouring the Glads. There is a sliver of hope for embattled Sebastian, however, and that hope lies with Tua getting knocked out and Marcus Mariota entering the game. This will at least slow the Georgia offence down enough that a fully functional Sebastain offence could keep pace against a leaky Georgia defence. Nah...it won't happen! **PICK: GEORGIA**

SCARBOROUGH @ LAPLATA (line – BRAVES by 7)

INJURIES: Scarborough – James Smith-Williams (QUESTIONABLE), Allen Robinson (OUT); **LaPlata** – Ronnie Stanley (OUT), Alijah Vera-Tucker (OUT).

I don't usually give out fantasy football advice, but if you are looking for a way to maximize your line-up and you have either Joe Mixon or Jahmyr Gibbs available, play them. The Blue Eagles have the worst run defence in the league, and it is not just because opposing coaches run at them to run out the clock in a blowout – it's because they are begging to be run on at any time and at any place on the field. The team that surrendered a league single-game rushing record to Nick Chubb, just gave up another '200 Burger' to Derrick Henry last week. And it is not as if the Blue Eagles don't know what's coming – they just can't stop it. This is an ideal situation for CJ Stroud,

who, while showing arm talent, is still in the “game manager” phase as a quarterback. He’ll manage this one easily. **PICK: LAPLATA**

DURHAM @ EAST ELMHURST (line – THUNDER LIZARDS by 4)

INJURIES: Durham – Cooper Kupp (OUT), Jeremy Ruckert (OUT); East Elmhurst – None

The Thunder Lizards are coming off a bitter loss to the North Stars, one that saw their vaunted defence give up a 13-point lead in the final fifteen minutes. That means they will be in a gnarly mood coming into East Elmhurst to face an Irish team that got its butt kicked by Georgia in the second half. For two quarters the offence hung in by going for broke on fourth down and letting Sam Darnold wing it with abandon. But they could only sustain it for so long. At an even 500, the Irish have performed better than expected, but the knowledge that they are one of those teams that can sting a good opponent, but probably won’t, is sinking in with the faithful. They don’t have much of a chance in this game, unless Durham decides to be proactive again in “preventing” injuries to starters. Cooper Kupp is legitimately injured, but the Lizards have shown they can win without him against a mediocre opponent. **PICK: DURHAM**

YORK @ PICKERING (line – SPARTANS by 10)

INJURIES: York – Treylon Burks (OUT), Rashan Gary (OUT), Cole Holcomb (OUT), Javonte Williams (OUT), Jabari Zuniga (OUT), Phidarian Mathis (IR); Pickering – Jayron Kears (PROBABLE), Jadeveon Clowney (OUT).

The Spartans remain perfect after digging out a win in the wind at Cowtown last week. Jalen Hurts pulled out the victory with his arm this time rather than his legs, and Kyle Dugger salted it away with a dramatic fumble return for a touchdown. Things are breaking Pickering’s way even when not all their weapons are firing, the sign of a team with great potential. The Excaliburs let Derrick Henry carry the load last week, stabilizing their mini slide with a win over Scarborough. Given all the attention Henry is receiving this year, one expects more from Tom Brady, who seems to be ageing ever so slightly with every game. Brady has been underestimated due to age before, only to prove the critics wrong, but this week he faces a ball-hawking terror in Tariq Woolen and the Spartans secondary that a younger Brady would be wary of. Expect more Henry from York and not enough points from the ‘Great One.’ **PICK: PICKERING**

BROOKLIN @ BUDAPEST (line – NORTH STARS by 9)

INJURIES: Brooklin – Garrett Boles (IR), Leighton Vander Esch (OUT); Budapest – Amare Barno (OUT).

A sense of relief is taking hold in Budapest fandom after back-to-back clutch performances from Aaron Rodgers. The future hall-of-famer has been taking much of the blame for an oddly sluggish offence reminiscent of the team’s Markham days. His three-touchdown streak against the Lizards brought back memories of two years ago, when the Stars were superstars. A similar feeling is permeating the Hawks’ fanbase with respect to their quarterback, Geno Smith, who supervised Drake London’s great day with a five-touchdown game last week. The fact that it came against Sebastian should be noted, but it was still impressive given that the Fish were pushing back hard. The North Stars are heavily favoured, but the Hawks have played them tough as underdogs before, as they will here. **PICK: BROOKLIN**

EFL FOCUS

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

COWTOWN



GRANDMA’S BOILED POTATOES AND APPLE PIE DESCRIBE THE CORN KINGS

By Orville Smucker (of ‘The Smucker Scoop’)

Legendary sportswriter, Orville Smucker of Cowtown Plain Dealer, winner of the prestigious EFL Legacy Award, wakes from his afternoon nap to give you his thoughts on the upcoming Corn Kings season.

2022 Record: 10-6-1 – Second wildcard berth. Lost in the wildcard round to Budapest.

The Skinny – A lazy off-season has the Corn Kings straddling a sharp picket fence with a field of post-season dreams on one side and fallow land of unknown fertility on the other. (Sorry, it’s hard to avoid the farm analogies when there is nothing but farmland outside the town limits).

The Corn Kings haven't got the quarterback position right since Joe Flacco, and some would say they didn't get it right with him either. They keep hoping for a breakthrough from Jimmy G that just hasn't come due to injuries and his indiscretions with Penny Appleton, enraging owner Farmer Brown. They now have four quarterbacks on the roster, only two of whom are likely to start. The offensive line is solid in the middle but weak on the edges. The defensive front is mediocre at best. Still, it's not a bad team, with the likes of T.J. Watt, Roquan Smith, Patrick Peterson and Mike Evans on the roster, just one that will have to win a lot of close games to make the playoffs.

The Offense – They say it all begins up front and that's a shame, because there isn't a dominator on the Cowtown offensive line this year, just four lunch pail types and one awkward-looking 1st-round pick at right tackle who better shape up in a hurry or he'll be cut before his second contract. For the second straight year there is no fullback on the roster, but the team hopes to make up for that with Mercedes Lewis. The backs are both hard runners with a bit of breakaway ability and the wide receivers are better than average, with Mike Evans and Christian Watson keeping opposing defences honest. They drafted Sam LaPorta to give them a receiving option at tight end that they have been missing in recent years. Will Jimmy G and his back-up Andy Dalton make the most of an average hand? That's the question nobody can answer until we see them on the field.

The Defense – T.J. Watt is the mom's homemade apple pie of the defence, but Roquan Smith, Patrick Peterson and Jeremy Chinn are all fancy fixin's, playmakers capable of making up, at least a bit, for a defensive line that won't make a difference against any offensive line worth its salt. The late pre-season trade for Yannick Ngakoue was a desperation move to get a pass rusher. Davon Hamilton is underrated, but a solid run-stopper. The rest of the defensive front is like Grandma's s boiled potatoes, filler. First-round pick Deonte Banks fills out a pretty good trio of cornerbacks with Peterson and Carlton Davis. Newcomer safety, Duron Harmon is pretty darn good, even if nobody knows who he is, even here in town. Andrew Van Ginkel is not eating his vegetables it seems, so here's hoping rookie Drew Sanders can do something in his place. Hope T.J. can stay healthy or we're in trouble.

The Outlook – The Corn Kings' main rival, Durham will be tough to beat for the division, so we are looking at a wildcard berth, if anything, again this year. It's hard to say where Scarborough and Sebastian are going, but I don't see them posing much trouble for us. If they do, we're in trouble, because the inter-conference matchups will be tough this year, with Virden, Peg City, Twin Cities and Chino on the schedule. The Coastal Division, right next door to us, is strong again. I don't see us piling up 10 wins like we did last year – everything would have to go right for that. Nine wins is reasonable, while crossing our fingers that the other teams in the conference beat themselves up enough to let us sneak into the wildcard round.

