

# 2015

CONFERENCE FINALS



# EFL NEWS

ELITE FOOTBALL LEAGUE

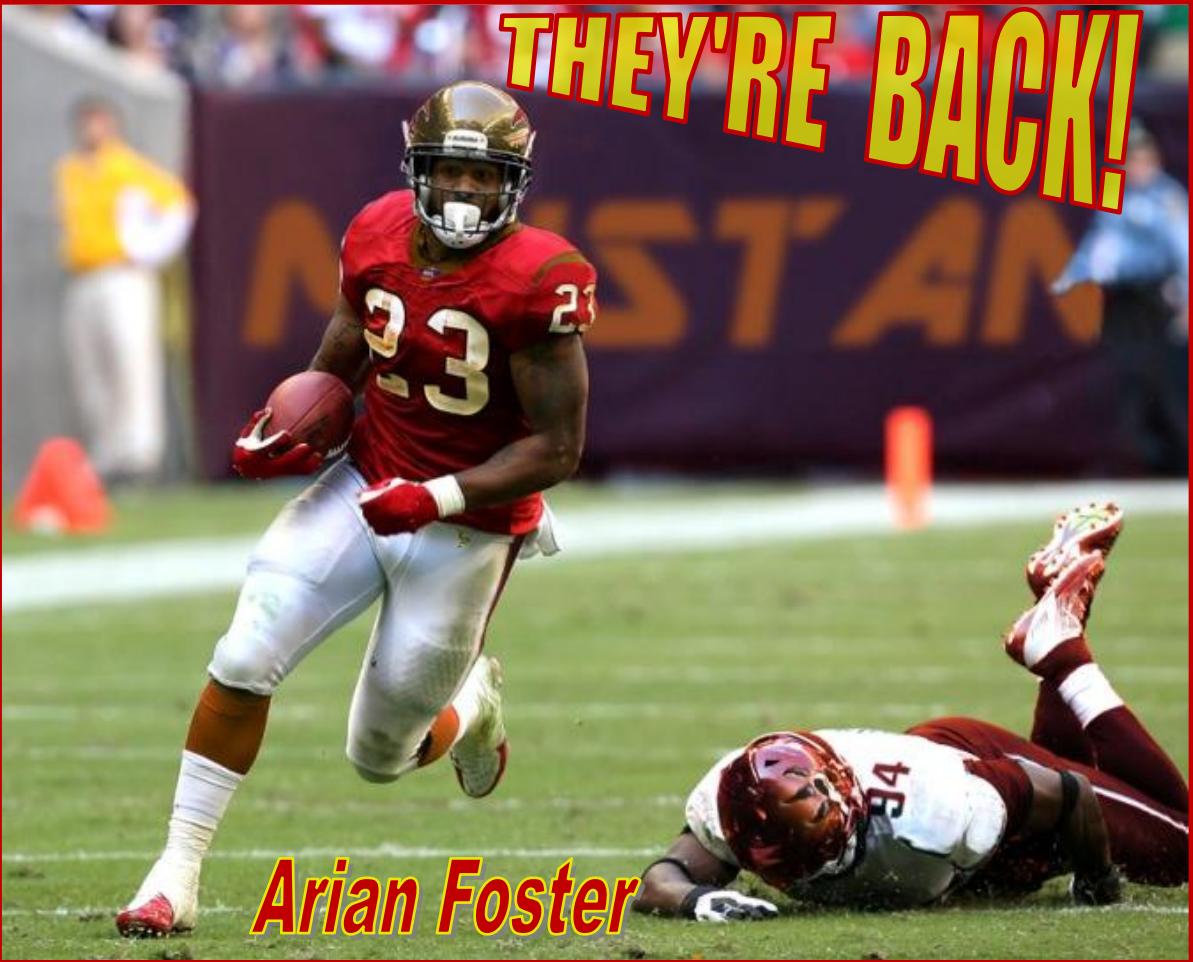
# 2015

CONFERENCE FINALS

February 15, 2016



EAST	WEST	NORTH	SOUTH
IOWA CITY CUBS	23	DURHAM THUNDER LIZARDS	3
CHARLESWOOD PATRIOTS	31	AURORA MUSTANGS	27



**Arian Foster**

### LATEST EFL NEWS INSIDE

- PATS HANG ON TO KNOCK OFF CUBBIES
- DINOS DIE
- AND MORE.....
- Also in this issue
  - SPATS FEATURE, 'HIGH NOON,' & 'MVP SEARCH'
  - JIMMY THE GEEK BREAKS DOWN THE EFL FINAL

**Arian Foster** (left) makes Durham DT **Carl Davis** miss as he begins a 63-yard TD run in 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter action in Aurora. The score broke the game open and the Mustangs won handily, 27-3.



Who was slick in the Conference Finals?

**"BRYLCREEM" THE EFL'S FIRST SPONSOR**



**Arian Foster**  
RB  
Aurora Mustangs

31 Carries, 215 yards, 4 Rec., 50 yards. 2 TDs. (1 run, 1 pass)



**Desmond Trufant**  
CB  
Charleswood Patriots

4 Tackles, 3 PD, 1 INT. Virtuoso coverage against Cubs deep threats.



13-5-0



# CAN-AM CONFERENCE FINALS



18-0-0

# Durham

3

## MVP

Arian Foster

27

# Aurora

### TEAM LEADERS

Passing	Cmp	Att	Yds	TD
Brees	15	32	100	0
Rushing	Car	Yds	Avg	TD
Hyde	6	34	5.7	0
Receiving	Rec	Yds	Avg	TD
Johnson	8	63	7.9	0

Team	1	2	3	4	OT	Total
Durham	0	3	0	0	-	3
Aurora	3	6	15	3	-	27

### TEAM LEADERS

Passing	Cmp	Att	Yds	TD
Ryan	19	31	188	1
Rushing	Car	Yds	Avg	TD
Foster	31	215	6.9	1
Receiving	Rec	Yds	Avg	TD
Miller	6	56	9.3	0

### Play of the Game

Early in the 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter, leading 9-3, the Mustangs went for 4<sup>th</sup> & 1 at their own 29. **Arian Foster** gained 3 yards to keep the drive going and later scored a TD on a 63-yard run.

### KEYS TO THE GAME

- Brees sacked 6 times
- 11 missed tackles
- 3 of 14 on 3<sup>rd</sup> down
- Poor offensive line play

## FOSTER CARE!

### AURORA RB SCORES 2 TDs, RACKS UP 265 TOTALS YARDS!

### KEYS TO THE GAME

- Foster on the ground and through the air
- 37+ minutes T.O.P
- Just 1 missed tackle

**SUMMARY:** For the second consecutive year the Mustangs hosted the Thunder Lizards for the right to represent the Can-Am Conference in the EFL Championship Game. In order for Durham to prevail they would need a good game from **Drew Brees**, but from the start the Lizards' QB was under pressure from the Mustangs pass rush. After a 4<sup>th</sup> down stop at the Mustangs' 40 on Aurora's opening drive, Durham lost their opportunity to capitalize when **Trent Cole** sacked Brees for a 9-yard loss, forcing a punt. The Durham 'D' forced a three-and-out deep in Mustangs territory on the next drive, but a subsequent Durham three-and-out squandered good field position. The Mustangs broke the scoreless tie with a 52-yard **Nick Folk** FG after a methodical 50-yard drive from their 16. **JJ Watt** sacked Brees on the first play of the next series and Durham entered the 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter without having gained a 1<sup>st</sup> down. Aurora continued to push the confused Lizards backwards, forcing a punt from deep in their territory that set up Aurora on the Durham side of mid-field. An 11-yard run by **Arian Foster** and a personal foul penalty on **Richard Sherman** put them in easy FG range and Folk was true from 31 yards to make it 6-3. A 4<sup>th</sup> & 1 2-yard run by **Carlos Hyde** from the Durham 37 to earn the Lizards their first 1<sup>st</sup> down, but soon they were punting again. Their defence held once more and they regained possession at their 29. A 28-yard run by Hyde helped set up a 54-yard FG by **Phil Dawson** to put Durham on the board with 2:39 left in the 1<sup>st</sup> half, but the Mustangs charged back with 55 yards rushing by Foster to score a FG before the end of the half. Durham started with possession in the 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter, but after driving to the Aurora 39 they were forced to punt. The Mustangs came back with more of Foster and the RB delivered with a 63-yard TD run for the game's first major score. A **Cliff Avril** sack scuttled Durham's next possession and the Mustangs took over at their 25. **Matt Ryan** converted 4<sup>th</sup> & inches at mid-field then three plays later broke the game open with a check down to Foster for a 33-yard TD. With the Mustangs' D playing pass, the Durham offence could make no headway. A 74-yard interception return by **Josh Norman** set up another Folk FG and the Aurora defence man-handled the Durham offence the rest of the way.

**QUOTES:** "That defence performed the best I have ever seen them perform. They totally controlled the line of scrimmage. Having said that, I know we can do better on offence. We were confused at times and gun-shy at others. It's a sad way to end the season," – Durham Coach, **George Kaldis**.  
 "Arian is really hot. He wants this ring badly. He is picking me and the whole team up. Our defence....what more can anyone ask of a defence? Does it feel different this year? Not really, it feels like the same team as last year." – Aurora QB, **Matt Ryan**, on why the Mustangs are winning.



### ANGRY FAN



### titter

### HAPPY FAN



**Sir Reginald @RMClapham**  
 A more bolt-upright do down dewskitch I never saw! Time to get drunk as a lord.



**James Duthie @efljamesduthie**  
 The machine is in OVERDRIVE. Look out Pats!





# Durham 3 Aurora 27



	1	2	3	4	F
Durham	0	3	0	0	3
Aurora	3	6	15	3	27

## Scoring

1	0:30	Aurora	FG	Folk 52 (11-50-6:15)	0-3
2	12:27	Aurora	FG	Folk 31 (8-33-2:15)	0-6
2	2:39	Durham	FG	Dawson 54 (6-35-2:15)	3-6
2	0:03	Aurora	FG	Folk 22 (10-76-2:32)	3-9
3	8:04	Aurora	TD	Foster 63 run (2 - Foster) (7-80-3:06)	3-17
3	0:20	Aurora	TD	Ryan 33 pass to Foster (Folk) (10-75-5:16)	3-24
4	5:01	Aurora	FG	Folk 25 (4-8-2:05)	3-27

## Player Stats

Passing	Att	Cmp	Yds	25	In	Td	Sk	Rate
Brees	32	15	100	0	1	0	5	41.1
Foles	2	1	3	0	0	0	1	56.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>41.7</b>

Passing	Att	Cmp	Yds	25	In	Td	Sk	Rate
Ryan	31	19	188	1	1	1	2	75.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>188</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>75.7</b>

Rushing	Att	Yds	Avg	FD	10	Lg	Td
Hyde	6	34	5.7	2	1	28	0
Bush	4	15	3.8	0	0	5	0
Hester	1	7	7.0	0	0	7	0
Bradshaw	2	0	0.0	0	0	0	0
Brees	1	-1	-1.0	0	0	0	0
Foles	1	-1	-1.0	0	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>3.6</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>0</b>

Rushing	Att	Yds	Avg	FD	10	Lg	Td
Foster	31	215	6.9	11	7	63	1
Artis-Payne	6	8	1.3	0	0	4	0
Hewitt	2	0	0.0	0	0	1	0
Ryan	5	-2	-0.4	1	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>221</b>	<b>5.0</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>1</b>

Receiving	No	Dp	Att	Yds	Avg	FD	25	Lg	Td
Johnson	8	1	11	63	7.9	3	0	12	0
Decker	3	0	6	15	5.0	1	0	6	0
Bush	2	0	5	9	4.5	0	0	6	0
Gordon	1	0	2	9	9.0	0	0	9	0
Bradshaw	1	1	6	3	3.0	0	0	3	0
Sherman,A	1	0	2	4	4.0	0	0	4	0
Hilton	0	1	2	0	0.0	0	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>6.4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>0</b>

Receiving	No	Dp	Att	Yds	Avg	FD	25	Lg	Td
Miller	6	0	7	56	9.3	2	0	17	0
Boldin	5	0	12	46	9.2	1	0	10	0
Foster	4	0	5	50	12.5	2	1	33	1
Holmes	3	1	5	29	9.7	2	0	11	0
Celek	1	0	2	7	7.0	1	0	7	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>188</b>	<b>9.9</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>0</b>

Fumbles	No	Rec	Td
Foles	1	0	0
Brees	1	0	0
Armstead	0	1	0
Davis,D	0	1	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>0</b>

Fumbles	No	Rec	Td
Foster	1	0	0
Boykin	0	1	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>

Kick Returns	No	Yds	Avg	Lg	Td
Hester	4	85	21.3	29	0
Galik	1	6	6.0	6	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>18.2</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>0</b>

Kick Returns	No	Yds	Avg	Lg	Td
Polk	1	10	10.0	10	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>10.0</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>0</b>

Punt Returns	No	Fc	Yds	Avg	Lg	Td
Hester	2	1	14	7.0	9	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>7.0</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>0</b>

Punt Returns	No	Fc	Yds	Avg	Lg	Td
Edelman	6	0	30	5.0	10	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>5.0</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>0</b>

Kicking	FG	Lg	XP	Pts
Dawson	1-1	54	0-0	3

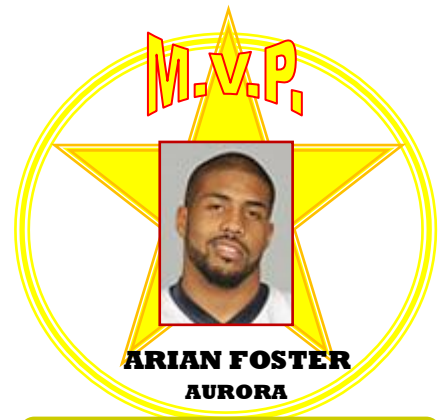
Kicking	FG	Lg	XP	Pts
Folk	4-4	52	1-1	13

Punting	No	Yds	Avg	Tb	20	Bk	Lg
Morstead	9	404	44.9	2	3	0	57

Punting	No	Yds	Avg	Tb	20	Bk	Lg
Koch	4	195	48.8	1	1	0	53

Defense	Tkl	Sk	Def	Stf	Hur	FF	Int
McCourty	8	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Dumervil	7	2	0	1	0	0	0-0
Allen	7	0	0	3	1	1	0-0
Sherman,R	7	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Davis,T	6	0	0	0	0	0	1-0
Murphy	6	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Davis,D	6	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Joseph	5	0	0	1	0	0	0-0
Paea	4	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Rodgers-Cro	3	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Chancellor	2	0	1	0	0	0	0-0
Houston	2	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Wootton	2	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Goldman	2	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Jones	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Foot	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Carter	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Hayden	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Rowe	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Mathieu	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
<b>Total</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1-0</b>

Defense	Tkl	Sk	Def	Stf	Hur	FF	Int
Avril	5	2	0	2	0	1	0-0
Watt	5	1	0	1	0	0	0-0
Jenkins	5	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Weddie	5	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Thomas,E	3	0	1	0	0	0	0-0
Peterson	3	0	1	0	0	0	0-0
Norman	2	0	3	0	0	0	1-74
Cole	2	1	0	0	1	0	0-0
Starks	2	1	0	0	0	0	0-0
Carrie	2	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Boykin	2	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Davis	2	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Celek	2	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Bailey	2	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Young	1	1	0	0	0	1	0-0
Pierre-Loui	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Williams,S	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Mohamed	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Dansby	0	0	1	0	0	0	0-0
<b>Total</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1-74</b>



265 total yards (215 rush, 50 rec). 2 TDs. Scored the game's only majors.

	Durham	Aurora
First Downs	8	21
Rushes	15-54	44-221
Passes	34-16-103	31-19-188
Sacked	6-44	2-8
Fumble	2	1
Penalties	6-40	5-39
Turnovers	2	2
Missed Tackles	11	1
Dropped Passes	3	1
Bad Passes	4	1
Passes 25+	0	1
Runs 10+	1	7
Blitzes	0	15
Time	22:07	37:53
Third Down	3-14	5-17
Fourth Down	1-1	3-4
Red Att/Td/Fg	0/0/0	3/0/3
Net Offense	113	401



12-5-1

Iowa City

23

MVP

Lamar Miller

31

17-1-0

Charleswood

EFL ELITE FOOTBALL LEAGUE  
PAC CONFERENCE FINALS

TEAM LEADERS

Passing	Cmp	Att	Yds	TD
Wilson	25	45	273	1
Rushing	Car	Yds	Avg	TD
Hill	12	60	5.0	0
Receiving	Rec	Yds	Avg	TD
Fleener	5	70	14.0	0

Team	1	2	3	4	OT	Total
Iowa City	0	3	10	10	-	23
Charleswood	14	14	3	0	-	31

TEAM LEADERS

Passing	Cmp	Att	Yds	TD
Manning	23	30	204	2
Rushing	Car	Yds	Avg	TD
Miller	20	93	4.7	2
Receiving	Rec	Yds	Avg	TD
Witten	10	92	9.2	1

Play of the Game

Trailing 7-0 in the 1<sup>st</sup>, facing 1<sup>st</sup> &10 at his 13, **Russell Wilson** dropped back and was strip-sacked by Pats rookie **Danny Shelton**. The turnover led to a quick TD, changing the course of the game.

KEYS TO THE GAME

- No Russell Wilson miracle
- Early turnovers
- ineffective deep vertical game

PATS CLUB CUBS!

3 TURNOVERS + 3 PTS IN 1<sup>ST</sup> HALF  
EQUAL ELIMINATION FOR IOWA

KEYS TO THE GAME

- 8 PDs and 2 INTs for secondary
- Red zone efficiency
- Brought pressure

**SUMMARY:** In the comfortable indoors of Patriot Place veteran QB, **Peyton Manning** looked to pick up where he left off two years ago and pass his team to a berth in the EFL final. The up and coming Cubs and their young leader, **Russell Wilson**, were aiming to stop them and put themselves in the final for the first time since 2008. Early events could not have gone much worse for the visitors. Manning was all but perfect on the game's opening drive, completing 5 of 6 passes for 62 yards including a 27-yard hitch pass to **Jason Witten** for a TD to open the scoring. Wilson led a balanced counter-drive that reached the Pats 10 yard line, but **Desmond Trufant** intercepted Wilson in the end zone to turn away the Cubs threat. The Pats ran into a stone wall on their next possession when **Sheldon Richardson** dumped Manning for a 6-yard loss to force a punt. The Cubs took over at their 13 but rookie **Danny Shelton** sacked Wilson on the first play and forced a fumble, recovered by the Pats at the 7 yards line. Two plays later **Lamar Miller** was busting into the end zone from 2 yards out to double the Pats' lead. The Cubs failed to answer on their next series and the Pats drove back up the field, mixing passes and a 24-yard run by Miller to set up a 13-yard TD pass to **Dez Bryant**. The early disaster continued for the Cubs when **Jeremy Hill** fumbled on 4<sup>th</sup> and inches, turning the ball over to Charleswood at their 44. A 13-yard run by Miller and a 15-yard personal foul on Iowa helped close the distance for a 5-yard TD run by Miller to make it 28-0. The Cubs finally lit the board after a 30-yard completion to **Mike Wallace** set up a 49-yard FG as time expired in the half. The Cubs woes continued at the start of the 2<sup>nd</sup> half when **Husain Abdullah** picked off Wilson on the opening drive. That set up a FG for the Pats' final points. The Cubs charged back in trademark fashion, with Wilson hitting **Rueben Randle** for a 12-yard TD pass and **Casey Hayward** forcing an **Andre Johnson** fumble that set up a FG to narrow the Pats' lead to 31-16. **Darren Sproles** took a pitch 20 yards for another TD to make it 31-23 and a blocked FG by **Jason Pierre-Paul** gave the Cubs one last shot with 1:44 remaining. But a holding penalty on **Chance Warmack** brought up 4<sup>th</sup> & 16 and Wilson's scramble came up 2 yards short to end the rally attempt.

**QUOTES:** "Retire if we win? It's too early to say. One more game to accomplish the mission then I'll take some time to think about it over some Buds. Feeling the way I do right now, I'm not ready to hang it up," – Charleswood QB, **Peyton Manning**; when asked if this would be his last season. "First, I want to express how proud I am of my guys! We are a young team and we can only get better. This was a learning opportunity for us. I have no doubt we will be back next year and better for this experience. Congratulations to Peyton and the Pats," – Iowa City Coach QB, **Deron Redding**



ANGRY FAN

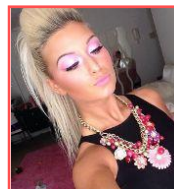


titter

HAPPY FAN



**Archibald Thacker @ArchieDMR**  
The coach coddled these youngsters all season and they collapsed under pressure. No surprise to me!



**Rebecca Findlay @RebFindlay**  
Yayyyy! We are going to CA!



# Iowa City 23 Charleswood 31



	1	2	3	4	F
Iowa City	0	3	10	10	23
Charleswood	14	14	3	0	31

## Scoring

1	9:42	Charleswood	TD	Manning 27 pass to Witten (Succop) (9-80-5:18)	0-7
1	1:39	Charleswood	TD	Miller 2 run (Succop) (2-7-0:46)	0-14
2	9:11	Charleswood	TD	Manning 13 pass to Bryant (Succop) (11-74-5:38)	0-21
2	0:42	Charleswood	TD	Miller 5 run (Succop) (8-56-4:39)	0-28
2	0:00	Iowa City	FG	Zuerlein 49 (6-49-0:38)	3-28
3	12:16	Charleswood	FG	Succop 37 (4-15-1:48)	3-31
3	9:31	Iowa City	TD	Wilson 12 pass to Randle (Zuerlein) (7-60-2:45)	10-31
3	4:04	Iowa City	FG	Zuerlein 33 (9-51-3:08)	13-31
4	12:31	Iowa City	FG	Zuerlein 30 (10-38-3:59)	16-31
4	6:02	Iowa City	TD	Sproles 20 run (Zuerlein) (12-80-4:51)	23-31

## Player Stats

Passing	Att	Cmp	Yds	25	Int	Td	Sck	Rate
Wilson	45	25	273	1	2	1	1	62.5
	45	25	273	1	2	1	1	62.5

Passing	Att	Cmp	Yds	25	Int	Td	Sck	Rate
Manning	30	23	204	1	0	2	4	116.5
	30	23	204	1	0	2	4	116.5

Rushing	Att	Yds	Avg	Fd	10	Lg	Td
Hill	12	60	5.0	3	1	11	0
Sproles	3	29	9.7	1	1	20	1
Wilson	6	25	4.2	1	2	14	0
Austin	1	16	16.0	1	1	16	0
McKinnon	1	7	7.0	0	0	7	0
	23	137	5.9	6	5	26	1

Rushing	Att	Yds	Avg	Fd	10	Lg	Td
Miller	20	93	4.7	7	2	24	2
Johnson D	4	21	5.3	1	1	17	0
Kuhn	1	6	6.0	1	0	6	0
Manning	2	-2	-1.0	0	0	0	0
	27	118	4.4	9	3	24	2

Receiving	No	Yds	Avg	Fd	25	Lg	Td
LaFell	5	0	14	42	8.4	2	0
Fraener	5	0	5	70	14.0	5	0
Hill	3	0	4	16	5.3	0	0
Randle	3	0	4	34	11.3	3	0
Wallace	3	1	8	52	17.3	2	1
Quick	3	0	3	40	13.3	3	0
Sproles	2	1	4	19	9.5	1	0
Miller	1	0	2	0	0.0	0	0
Austin	0	0	1	0	0.0	0	0
	29	2	45	273	10.8	16	1

Receiving	No	Yds	Avg	Fd	25	Lg	Td
Witten	10	0	11	92	9.2	3	1
Bryant	6	0	9	64	10.7	4	0
Johnson A	3	0	5	18	6.0	1	0
Miller	2	0	2	20	10.0	2	1
Kuhn	1	0	1	3	3.0	0	0
Watkins	1	0	2	7	7.0	0	0
	23	0	30	204	8.9	10	2

Fumbles	No	Ret	Td
Sproles	1	1	0
Hill	1	0	0
Wilson	1	0	0
Bortland	0	1	0
	3	2	0

Fumbles	No	Ret	Td
Manning	2	1	0
Johnson A	1	0	0
Shelton	0	2	0
Diemala	0	1	0
	3	4	0

Kick Returns	No	Yds	Avg	Lg	Td
Lockett	2	50	25.0	26	0
	2	50	25.0	26	0

Kick Returns	No	Yds	Avg	Lg	Td
Davis	4	114	28.5	43	0
	4	114	28.5	43	0

Punt Returns	No	Fc	Yds	Avg	Lg	Td
Sproles	1	2	-1	-1.0	0	0
	1	2	-1	-1.0	0	0

Punt Returns	No	Fc	Yds	Avg	Lg	Td
Martin	1	0	14	14.0	14	0
	1	0	14	14.0	14	0

Kicking	FG	Lg	XP	Pts
Zuerlein	3-3	49	2-2	11

Kicking	FG	Lg	XP	Pts
Succop	1-2	37	4-4	7

Punting	No	Yds	Avg	Tb	20	Bk	Lg
Anger	1	50	50.0	0	0	0	50

Punting	No	Yds	Avg	Tb	20	Bk	Lg
Huber	3	150	50.0	0	2	0	53

Defense	Tk	Sk	Def	Sf	Hur	FF	Int
Graham	10	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Mingo	9	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Pierre-Paul	5	1	0	1	2	0	0-0
Jones	5	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Ogletree	4	0	1	2	0	0	0-0
Cox	3	1	0	1	0	1	0-0
Hayward	3	0	1	0	0	1	0-0
Bortland	3	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Williams M	2	1	0	0	1	1	0-0
Richardson	2	1	0	0	1	0	0-0
Rhodes	2	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Jenkins	1	0	1	0	0	0	0-0
Dear	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Gilmore	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Smith L	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Jacobs	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Zuerlein	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Watkins	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
	55	4	3	4	4	3	0-0

Defense	Tk	Sk	Def	Sf	Hur	FF	Int
David	10	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Collins	6	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Mosley C	6	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Talib	5	0	2	0	0	0	0-0
Trufant	4	0	3	0	0	0	1-0
Abdullah	3	0	1	0	0	0	1-22
Hankins	3	0	0	0	3	1	0-0
Mosley C	3	0	1	0	0	0	0-0
Clinton-Dix	3	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Hayward	2	0	1	1	1	0	0-0
Moore	2	0	0	0	0	1	0-0
Powers	2	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Shelton	1	1	0	0	1	1	0-0
Johnson L	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Williams T	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Bennett	0	0	0	0	1	0	0-0
	52	1	8	1	8	3	2-22



20 Carries, 93 yards, 7 1<sup>st</sup> Dwns, 2 TDs. Red zone magic led Pats scoring.

	Iowa City	Charleswood
First Downs	23	20
Rushes	23-137	27-118
Passes	45-25-273	30-23-204
Sacked	1-6	4-24
Fumble	3	3
Penalties	3-30	5-45
Turnovers	4	1
Missed Tackles	8	5
Dropped Passes	2	0
Bad Passes	6	2
Passes 25+	1	1
Runs 10+	5	3
Blitzes	1	22
Time	27:05	32:55
Third Down	4-11	8-12
Fourth Down	2-4	0-0
Red Att/Td/Fg	5/2/1	4/3/1
Net Offense	404	298



# AROUND THE



## With Spats McChad

NEW YORK – I endured some barbs and flak from the cyber peanut gallery and a rebuke from my boss, **Mr. Finchley**, for deferring my predictions of the Conference Finals until after the games were completed. [Titter.com](https://www.titter.com) took a sharp and nasty run at me as did hundreds of commentators in the various e-newspapers and websites that carry my weekly column. One of the more creative zingers directed my way was: “Spats McChicken now on the menu at McLosers,” posted by some half-wit under the handle *Hamburgler*. So, you can imagine how tedious and lowbrow the rest of the commentary was. However, one clever twit, @MrZaneypox, did recently shout out, “We can now infer from the results that you favoured Iowa City and Durham?” Nice try, whoever you – “Mr. Zaneypox” – but everyone knows that I *never* favour Iowa City in a playoff game.

I refused to play the guessing game this time on principal. I was...<ahem>...wrong...in both my Conference Final picks last year and it unleashed a torrent of “hahas” from the usual band of half-literate quasi-adolescents who struggle to read my column every week. I find it hard to believe some of them – such as @GoDawg, who tweeted at the time, “U R a Loser!” – are actually capable of reading it, seeing that I frequently use multi-syllable words and often construct my sentences with multiple independent and subordinate clauses. The Titter Generation is pushing our language toward symbols and away from actual words. Some day because of this we will be stuck with a hieroglyph or character writing system, like the Ancient Egyptians or the Chinese, causing glorious adjectives and adverbs to be no more.

Since many of you seem to be clamouring to know what I *would* have predicted, here it goes:

For most of this season I thought it was Durham’s Year. That is, until they got their tails snipped off in a Week Thirteen beat down in Aurora. You probably don’t recall that I went on the record after that game with the pronouncement that Durham would not win the championship and may not even win a playoff game. So, why would I belabour the point with a space-wasting, banal prediction that they would lose to the best team in the league on the road in the Conference Final? Of course, they were going to lose! Prediction One: check.

All along I have felt that the return of **Peyton Manning** to Charleswood would bring something special to Pats fans who had endured a wasted season the year before and that it would not necessarily depend on Peyton delivering the goods like he used to. That view hadn’t changed going into the PAC Final despite the Cubs accounting for the Pats’ only loss in the regular season. There was no doubt in my mind that the Pats were going to find a way to win against an arguably more talented Cubs team! It was Peyton making the whole team better, stupid! Prediction Two: check.

I would defer my Championship prediction as well except that I have a huge fine looming over my head if I don’t put my credentials on the line with my call for the Final. So, I give you, my dear readers, the treasure of my insight – imperfect as that may (on very rare occasions) be.

Most will call for an Aurora win in the final. There are plenty of reasons to agree with the majority, not the least of which that the defence of the Mustangs just made a future Hall-of-Fame quarterback look like a scared rookie in the Conference Final. But the minority view, to which I subscribe, sees **Peyton Manning** (even a Peyton whispered to be past his ‘Best Before Date) finding a way to overcome the odds. I think the Pats D will show up and Peyton will play the game of his life, (or at least not play like an over-matched wiener) and engineer the final drive that gives Charleswood a 19-17 win. Bank on it.

### **HIGH NOON**

I admit – despite my dim view of them as a playoff team, this year I had nagging doubts that the Cubs would choke on the road against a football icon like **Peyton Manning**. The nature of football sometimes favours juiced-up violence over brains and strategy. In other words, a **Sheldon Richardson** going ape-shit on a **Rob Sims** can blow apart the cleverest blocking scheme and sack the most sagacious QB. If the Cubs played their physical age and the game plan was good, it might not even be close.

This year’s PAC Final featured a classic showdown between Peyton, the ‘Old Gunslinger,’ and the ‘Young Gun,’ **Russell Wilson**, the most successful of a new breed of play-by-the-seat-of-your-pants quarterbacks. The official Manning-loving mainstream sports media was careful not to play it up as a “showdown” however, just in case Manning lost. “Showdown” creates the air of a title fight; the winner of which can claim superiority over the loser until overturned by another “showdown.” There is no way that the Peter Prince’s and Kris Hortenson’s of the sports media world would ever want fans to think that even a creek-boned, shrinking, hobbled remnant of **Peyton Manning** was inferior to any quarterback currently playing in the league,



apart from maybe **Tom Brady** or **Drew Brees**.

Wilson's day in the media sun will inevitably come – if he keeps playing at his current level – but this week he was merely a “dashing,” “daring,” “dynamic,” “gutsy,” “feisty,” “slippery,” “gung-ho,” “competitive” up-and-comer, who was “breathing life back into football” in the great Broccoli State. They are all complimentary adjectives, but none of them equal “great,” which is, of course, what **Peyton Manning** is, whether he plays like it or not on any given day.

On paper, the Cubs could be considered on par with Aurora. They boasted the league's no.1 rated offence and the no.2 rated defence during the regular season and they frequently looked the part. But the Cubs had been plagued by inconsistency. They had dealt the Pats their only loss of the season but they had also lost to the likes of Mission Viejo and had failed to solve the puzzle of their main West Division rival, Beaufort County – until **RGIII** had solved it for them with a 4<sup>th</sup> quarter meltdown in the quarter finals.

Still, the nerves of the Patriots faithful were tingling as their team prepared to host the only team that had gotten the better of them in 2015. The Vegas betting line, placing the Cubs as 3-point favourites, did nothing to calm nerves in Winnipeg. A crisis of confidence had infected the fan base and had spread to the local media. **Chaz Charlston**, host of the weekly TV show, ‘*Pat Down*,’ declared on the Friday before the game that “*only Peyton can save us now!*”

Cubs fans, on the other hand, were as confident as they had ever been. **Rodney Alberhasky Sr.**, the ancient owner of the Cubs, had footed the bill for a wagon train of fans from the poorer rural areas of the State of Iowa to attend the game at Patriot Place. This was to:



Patriots' tight end **Jason Witten** prepares to make a cut after making a catch in 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter action at Patriot Place. Witten got his team on the board first with a 27-yard catch-and-run TD in the 1<sup>st</sup> quarter of a 31-23 Charleswood

“*give back to the fans who have supported us with their hearts, if not their wallets, through thick and thin,*” Alberhasky Sr., had explained in a press conference before nodding off in his wheelchair. His son, Rodney Jr., had continued in the same vein, praising Iowa fans as “*the best in the country*” and that the only regret he had was that “*we did not bring the playoffs back to Joe Ferguson Stadium. So, Dad and I are bringing a bunch of you to Charleswood to cheer on our Cubbies!*”

They called it a “wagon train” because they did not have a more modern term for it, but it was actually a parade of vintage pick-up trucks and trailers stretching for over half a mile as it crawled northwards up the I-94, clogging traffic and overrunning service centres along the way. The 160 lucky winners of the Cubs' ‘All-In’ Playoff lottery sweepstakes saw fit to bring their “kin” with them, without tickets to the game, swelling the booster parade to well over one thousand souls, with barnyard animals in tow. They snarled traffic for a day at the Pembina-Emerson border crossing as Canadian officials had to turn away hundreds of irate Iowans and their livestock for improper or non-existent paperwork.

“*Sir, you cannot bring your chickens across the border without a permit and proof of vaccination,*” declared a border guard to one **Festus Clamphard** of Leon, IA in an exchange caught by Canadian and American TV cameras covering the bizarre “international incident.”

An outraged Festus, no doubt emboldened by the presence of the cameras, bellowed: “*How do you expect me to feed my family up in Canader, then? We have no money! You would have my wife and chil'n starve to death in the cold!*”

Another enraged Iowan declared loudly to a young female official: “*I am Arbald Rufus Tingley of Planter's Wart, Iowa. My father was Rufus Arbald Tingley and his father was Arbald Rufus Bo Tingley. My mother was Amaleen Platt and her father was Garfield Platt, the owner of Platt Feeds. I've told you who I am; what more do you want from me, young lady?*”

“*I would like your passport, sir,*” she replied evenly.

And so the cacophony went on for almost a full 24 hours, without violence but with plenty of anguish and children and chickens running loose on the road. In the end, only 86 of the lucky ‘All-In’ lottery winners actually managed to get across the border



Upbeat Patriots fans look on as their team builds an early lead in the 1<sup>st</sup> half against the Iowa City Cubs in the PAC Final. A perturbed looking **Bucephelus Barnett** of Plano, IA, one of dozens of lucky “All-In” Sweepstakes winners who received free tickets to the game, waves a homemade placard in an attempt to rally his team. The Cubs would partially recover from a slow start but failed to overcome a 28-point deficit.

and of those only about half made it to Patriot Place in time to witness the game, as the 750 mile trip and the weather took their toll on the ancient jalopies in the convoy. But the unfortunate ones who were unable to cash in on the Alberhasky’s largesse may not have been so unfortunate after all. For it was soon apparent that it was not going to be a very good day for the Cubs on the field.

Or it was going to be a very good day for Peyton and the Pats....depending on your point of view. The ‘Old Gunslinger’ looked cool as a cucumber on the opening drive, methodically picking apart a very passive Cubs defence. It took him 4:30 to cover 53 yards to the Iowa City 27 then it took **Jason Witten** about 10 seconds to find an open space underneath, snatch a short pass from the Old Guy, and rumble with deceptive agility all the way to the end zone for the opening score. 7-0 Pats and the dome was abuzz with the constrained merriment of a happy, but not yet relaxed partisan crowd. On the Cubs sideline, corner **Corey Graham**, the team leader in interceptions during the regular season, shrugged his shoulders as he walked past the coaching staff. **Deron Redding**, looking unperturbed, gave him a pat on the rump and flashed a smile.

The ‘Young Gun’ **Russell Wilson** looked confident and determined as he sprinted onto the field after a **Tyler Lockett** 24-yard kick return gave the Cubs 1<sup>st</sup> & 10 at their 23 yard line. He wasted no time trying to recoup the deficit, dropping back and looking deep for **Mike Wallace** down the sideline. It was a good play call – the Pats were crowding the line looking for **Jeremy Hill** – but **Aqib Talib** had Wallace shadowed, forcing Wilson to take it himself for an 11-yard gain. The Pats continued to focus on Hill while Wilson completed his next two passes. On 2<sup>nd</sup> & 3 he tried to go deep again, this time to **Brandon LaFell**, but **Desmond Trufant** was stuck to the Cub receiver like glue, forcing a check down, incomplete to Wallace. Another check down on 3<sup>rd</sup> & 3 was good for 16 yards to tight end **Coby Fleener** then, with the Pats finally looking for the pass, Hill got the call on the ground for 5 yards and **Tavon Austin** ran off tackle for 16 yards to give them 1<sup>st</sup> & goal at the 10 yard line.

The Cubs had the Pats completely off-balance and looked poised to score, to the braying delight of the Iowa bumpkins scattered throughout the stands. But on the very next play a pumped up Wilson dropped back and fired the ball toward Fleener without really looking at the coverage. The Pats were in a zone and Trufant, the nearest defensive back, read Wilson’s eyes perfectly. He got inside the receiver, leaped in the air and snared the pass for an interception in the end zone. A mixture of surprise and relief caused Pats fans to erupt uproariously in celebration. Their team had dodged a bullet in an improbable manner – Wilson had thrown only 4 picks all season, best in the league. Things were certainly going the Pats’ way in the early going.

Wilson strode off the field and pulled off his helmet. He smirked and shrugged his shoulders as Coach Redding patted him on the back, shook his head slightly, and chuckled. Something he said made Wilson laugh and the two talked animatedly for about 30 seconds, both of them looking confident and energized. Whatever was going on there did not involve panic of any kind.

On the Pats’ next series, **Sheldon Richardson** roughly set aside **Rob Sims** on a bull rush and brought down a statuesque Manning for a 6-yard loss to snuff out the drive. The big menace of a defensive tackle beat his chest and roared to the rafters as the



'eeeeyaaahs' of the Cubs 'All-In' crowd punctured the air like little needles. The Cubs defence had eclipsed some of the Old Gunslinger's calm. Manning strode peevishly back to the Patriots' sideline and huddled with the offensive coordinator.

A 53-yard punt by **Kevin Huber** and a negative return by **Darren Sproles** backed the Cubs up to their own 13 yard line, but the Cubs did not look at all concerned. Wilson surveyed the defence, took the snap, dropped back three steps and cocked his arm. But before he could bring it forward, Pats rookie defensive tackle **Danny Shelton** ploughed over left guard **Chance Warmack** and chopped down Wilson like an axe-wielding Paul Bunyan felling a Christmas tree. The ball came loose as Shelton fell forward – as luck would have it – on top of the ball. To the deafening jubilation of the sold out crowd, the Pats had recovered the fumble at the Cubs' 7 yard line and two plays later, **Lamar Miller** was cutting around **Fletcher Cox** for a 2-yard touchdown run.

Miller skipped back to the sideline holding the ball high like a trophy as he bobbed his head at the applauding crowd. The Pats were animated on the sideline as they digested their quick start. The Cubs, too, looked upbeat – even buoyant. Redding and Wilson conferred on the sideline, bursting out laughing at one point as the TV networks took a break for sponsors. When the Cubs got the ball back they again looked deep on the first play. The protection held up for about 6 seconds while Wilson surveyed the field, finding nobody open. With the pocket finally collapsing he tucked it under and managed to get past the line of scrimmage for a 1-yard gain. An 11-yard run by Hill got them a first down then two more incomplete passes on either side of a 6-yard run by Sproles forced their first punt of the game. The Patriot defensive backs were having a superlative afternoon in the game's early going.

A serious-looking Manning strode purposefully onto the field after a 14-yard return by **Keshawn Martin** gave the Pats possession at their 26 yards line. Brow furrowed, he barked out "*Omaha*" a few too many times and handed the ball off to Miller on three straight snaps for a first down before returning to the air with short, accurate passes to gain another pair of first downs. The Cubs defence changed coverage depth and formations but did nothing to force the play. They were clearly expecting their front four to generate pressure on its own, but the Pats' line was doing a good job of holding up. Manning 'Omaha-ed' back to Miller, who followed a **Nate Solder** block for a 24-yard gain to the Iowa City 12 yard line. Rookie running back **Duke Johnson**, appearing for the first time in the game, went backwards on the next play, but two plays later, Manning calmly threaded the needle on a slant to **Dez Bryant** for a 13-yard touchdown pass and a 21-0 Patriots advantage.

The game was clearly getting out of hand for the Cubs, but as Wilson strutted confidently back onto the field for his team's fourth possession of the half and **Deron Redding** prowled along the Cubs bench pumping up his players with positive and re-assuring messages, a viewer just tuning into the game might be excused for thinking that the Cubs were the team leading 21-0. It was even a little unnerving for anyone paying close attention to the player's body language and facial expressions, such as the network TV cameras

and play-by-play commentators. It prompted TV analyst **Phil Mimms** to make the following observation: "Russell Wilson has overcome big deficits before but he is looking a little too nonchalant about this hole he and his team have dug for themselves."

"Deron Redding has instilled a lot of confidence in his team this year, Phil," replied booth partner **Bill Mimes**.

"Maybe too much confidence, Bill," added Mimms.

The Cubs started with a pair of Hill runs that gained 13 yards and a 1<sup>st</sup> down before Wilson made another attempt deep downfield. Again they caught the Pats guarding against the run and again Talib was up to the task going one-on-one with Wallace. Wilson was leveled after the throw by Shelton, drawing a roughing the passer penalty against Charleswood and another Cubs first down on the other side of mid-field. But the Pats' defence suddenly tightened up, forcing a 4<sup>th</sup> down decision at the 39. Facing 4<sup>th</sup> and inches and trailing by three touchdowns, the decision was a no-brainer. Both teams deployed jumbo packages for the short-yardage showdown. Hill got the call off right tackle, but as he crossed the line of gain, **Johnathan Hankins** reached out and stripped the ball. Shelton fell on it and the Pats had their third takeaway of the 1<sup>st</sup> half.

A grim and determined Manning took the field as a shoulder-shrugging Wilson jogged off. **Deron Redding**, for the first time that day, flashed a brief look of annoyance before jumping up to high-five the defence as they filed onto the field. The on-field cameras focused in, looking for some kind of reaction to fuel a story line.

"No pressure boys, but we need a stop here. Okay? Are we cool with that?" Redding called out to his D.



**Russell Wilson**, the Cubs' "Young Gun" at quarterback, reflects on his role in a game that got a little too out of hand for his team in the 1<sup>st</sup> half.

*“Are you doubting us, Coach?”* a frowning Richardson shot back. Without waiting for a reply, he turned to the other defenders and shouted: *“Coach is doubting us, boys!”*

*“Don’t be a Doubting Deron, coach! Remember what you said,”* safety **Reshad Jones** chuckled. *“Doubting Derons Don’t; Confident Cubbies Can!”*

*“Triple C!”* screamed **Corey Graham**. One beat later the rest of the defence answered in unison: *“C!C!C!”*

The Old Gunslinger continued to fire short and accurate passes, chipping away at a passive Cubs defence that was just beginning to show telltale signs of frustration. Richardson knocked down Manning after a throw, drawing a flag and giving the Pats 15 free yards to the Cubs’ 28 yard line. A 7-yard pass to Witten and three more carries by Miller got the ball across the goal line again, giving the Pats a 28-0 lead with 42 seconds remaining in the half. A deafening din of celebration reverberated in Patriot Place. For nervous Pats fans it was almost too good to be true.

Cubs fans were worried, but far from despondent. They had had nothing to cheer about to that point, but with Wilson the Magician at quarterback, anything was possible. As if to send a message to Cubs fans to stay tuned for the 2<sup>nd</sup> half, a steely-eyed Wilson threw Wallace open on a medium sideline pass that went for 30 yards to the Patriots’ 43 yard line with 16 seconds left in the half. A 12-yard pass to **Brian Quick** with 4 seconds left brought on **Greg Zuerlein** to kick a 49-yard field goal as time expired. Just like that, the Cubs had scored.

As the teams filed into the locker room, sideline reporter **Tracy Wolfson** saddled up to **Deron Redding** and asked him if he was disappointed in his team’s start. Such a question might have brought a blisteringly sarcastic response from some coaches, but not Redding. He smiled, stared into the reporter’s eyes and without a hint of irony replied:

*“We’re only down by 25 points, Tracy. We have a full half of football left. We scored 24 points in the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter last week. We’ve scored 35 and 31 points in one half this year. I believe in my players. I’m proud of them. The 2<sup>nd</sup> half will belong to us, I can assure you and Cubs fans of that!”*

The Cubs emerged from the locker room looking fresh and ready to go. An energetic Wilson burst onto the field to take possession at the 20 after the kickoff was downed in the end zone. He promptly threw a sideline pass into the arms of Pats safety **Husain Abdullah**, who returned it 22 yards to the Cubs 4 yard line. Wilson returned to the sideline straight-faced and immediately huddled with the coaches. This time there was no cavalier dismissal of the gaffe. The defence strode resolutely onto the field in near total silence. Only **Mario Williams** was heard to say anything at all. *“Let’s do this!”* he barked.

Even the overweening Cubs realized then that there was a “red line” deficit past which they would not recover. Any differential of over 30 points, from both a physical and psychological standpoint, would be tough to overcome, even with the best available ‘Win Therapy’ counsellors and Dr. Alberhasky’s ‘Confidence Pills’ pumping up the players’ morale on the sideline.

Williams did what veterans do in big moments; he made a big play, tossing aside left tackle **Lane Johnson** to get a clear run at the Old Gunslinger. He took him down – hard – knocking the ball loose. Had it bounced the Cubs way, who knows how it might have changed the outcome of the game. But in a sign that the stars were still aligning with the elder Manning, the ball bounced right up into Peyton’s arms as he came crashing to the turf – the wind rushing out of him as the Cubs star defensive end landed on him with his full weight. The Patriots settled for a field goal to make it 31-3, but the crowd was not celebrating full throat. The atmosphere had changed ever so slightly and they sensed danger.

As the Young Gun took to the field again his grim countenance betrayed his awareness of the precarious situation he and his team were facing. Although there were still 12 minutes left in the 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter, Wilson was heard to utter, as he strapped on his helmet: *“It’s Fourth Quarter Time!”*

A kick out of bounds gave the Cubs good field position at their 40 and Wilson took advantage. Conducting the offence like a two-minute drill, he passed his team up the field in medium-sized chunks, taking 7 plays and less than 3 minutes to cover 60 yards, finishing with a 12-yard pass to **Rueben Randle** in the end zone. The deficit was cut to 21 with still plenty of time left.

A **Jason Pierre-Paul** sack of Manning helped force and three-and-out on the Pats’ next series and the Cubs got the ball back in decent field position at their 34. They drove to the Pats 22 yard line but settled for a field goal when **Jerick McKinnon** fell 3 yards short of a 1<sup>st</sup> down. The Pats resolutely stuck to their game plan, using short passes to chip away at the Cubs defence, earning early success. They might have gone on to score again, but corner **Casey Hayward** punched the ball from the arms of **Andre Johnson** and Sproles recovered at mid-field to set up another Cubs field goal drive. Iowa had scored on its last three possessions to shrink the Charleswood lead to 15 points, 31-16. Patriot Place was silent but for the ‘yips’ of the ‘All-In.’

The Old Gunslinger, Manning was getting tired. He was all too well aware of the danger his team was facing, but he was sore and the ‘Omahas’ were cracking in his throat. The Cubs were tightening up their coverage and giving his receivers no room. He led his offence to another three-and-out, turning the ball over to the Cubs with over 10 minutes left to play. Meanwhile, an energized young Wilson was just beginning to hit his stride.

With the Patriots playing the pass the entire way, the Cubs gained a quick first down with two runs by Hill before Wilson went to work. Another deep look yielded nothing, as the Pats corners continued their stellar play, but there was enough room underneath to find Fleener for 14, Sproles for 10 and **Brian Quick** for 17 yards to propel the Cubs forward into the Pats red zone. Coach Redding then suddenly switched it up with a pitch to Sproles, which caught the Pats defenders off balance. The



elusive human water bug dipped and darted, cut back inside and blew by the Pats' safeties for a 20-yard touchdown run.

The sound of dueling banjos and the keening wail of frenzied *yipping* from the 'All-Ins' could be heard over the deathly silence that engulfed Patriot Place as Sproles spiked the ball and raced to embrace his teammates. The Pats' lead had shrunk to 8 points with 6 minutes left to play. Anyone who knew the Cubs was aware that 6 minutes was not only more than enough time for 'Wilson the Magician' to tie the game; it was enough time for him to take the lead and add an insurance score to boot.

"*Who are we?*" bellowed **Corey Graham** on the Cubs sideline.

"*TRIPLE C! C!C!C!*" the players replied in ragged unison.

Manning, the Old Gunslinger, stared out at the field as the Cubs lined up to kick off. His bones ached, his head throbbed, and he was feeling a cold coming on. He also had to go to the bathroom really badly, but he knew that now was not the time.

Owner, **Jason Findlay**, wearing his 2013 Championship jacket, strode up to the old star. He fidgeted with his hands in his pockets and shuffled his feet before addressing the full hall-of-famer. "*Peyton?*" he said.

"*Yes, Mr. Findlay,*" Manning answered, somewhat surprised to see the 'big guy' so close to the playing field at this time of the game.

"*Are you going to let that little shit Wilson kick your ass in your home park?*" his voice was quiet, even kindly-sounding, but underneath raged the fire of a true son-of-a-bitch competitor. "*Did I bring you back home for this?*" he added, tilting his head ever so slightly in the direction of the Cubs sideline, where the offensive linemen were dancing awkwardly to the sound of DNCE's '*Cake by the Ocean*,' being pumped over the stadium PA system.

"*Give me a couple of first downs, Peyton, so the defence can rest,*" Findlay said – more earnestly this time. "*Have you got a couple of first downs left in that arm of yours, Peyton? Have you!?*" He barked that last bit just loud enough for some of the other players to hear. They looked and turned away in embarrassment.

Peyton stared at the Cubs sideline then down at his feet. After what seemed like a very long time, but which was actually just the length of the final chorus of '*Cake by the Ocean*,' he turned to Findlay, gritted his teeth, and hissed: "*You bet I do, Mr. Findlay! You bet I do!*"

The Patriots got an unexpected boost to start their next drive when **Knile Davis** returned Zuerlein's kick 43 yards to the Patriots 42. Unless something disastrous happened, the Pats would at very least have a field position advantage should they have to punt the ball. Manning had a spring in his step as he jogged onto the field, but his ankle turned slightly as he gesticulated for the offence to huddle and he stumbled and fell to the turf.

This prompted laughter from the Cubs side of the line. "*Just stay down there Old Man, it'll save me having to put you there myself,*" goaded **Fletcher Cox**.

The Old Gunslinger stood under center and surveyed the Cubs defence. It was, as usual, set up in text book fashion in a base formation, but with one little wrinkle: the outside linebacker on the flanker side seemed to be cheating a touch wide and the free safety was shifted over toward the split end. *Double coverage on the wide-outs*, Peyton thought. With urgency he changed the play to the tight end, but his '*Omahas*' were becoming hoarse and ragged. Would Jason even hear them?

The reliable tight end did, and Peyton slung a quick slant to Witten, who fell forward for an 8-yard gain. Fearing that his '*Omahas*' would fail him at the line, Peyton called the next play in the huddle. The Cubs were in the same formation but tight to the line. He handed off to Miller, who ran for 7 yards. *One 1<sup>st</sup> down; one more to go*, he thought.

Miller got the handoff on the next play, good for 5 yards, then Bryant appeared to have a first down with a diving catch, but the completion was overturned on a challenge, bringing up 3<sup>rd</sup> & 5. The Pats brought in an extra wide receiver and the Cubs switched to a Dime package. Seeing his receivers were outnumbered, Peyton knew he had to switch the play; but would he be able to pull off the '*Omahas*' required to do it? Reaching deep for something extra, he barked out three raspy and creaky '*Omahas*' in rapid succession, straining to be heard above the rattling din of *eeehaws* coming from the Cubs fans in attendance. Miller heard the call and shifted to his right. Peyton took the snap and began clumsily back-pedaling. Patriot fans collectively held their breath in horror as Pierre-Paul and Cox bore down on Manning, gaining ground rapidly. Just as Cox reached out to grab his jersey and at the same moment that he began to lose his balance, Manning flipped the ball to Miller, who broke into the open field for a 9-yard gain to the Cubs' 29 yard line and a 1<sup>st</sup> down. *Two 1<sup>st</sup> downs; let's go in for the kill*, he thought to himself.

But two first downs turned out to be all the Old Gunslinger had left. His voice shot and out of '*Omahas*', he attempted another screen pass on third down but this time was sacked by a fuming Cox, who knocked the ball out in his fury. In a sign that the stars had not yet changed sides, however, the ball bounced toward guard **Kelechi Osemele**, who covered it up at the 31 yard line. With 1:51 left, **Ryan Succop** came on to attempt the 48-yarder that would have all but put the game away for the Pats.

The Cubs were far from done yet, however. Pierre-Paul, showing great speed for a big man, somehow managed to knife through a gap in the line. With his arms raised he blocked the kick and the Cubs fell on it at the 40 yard line! Worried Pats fans were suddenly back sitting on their hands as the Young Gun, Wilson, strutted onto the field to take over with 1:44 left and two timeouts. Old Peyton had done what he could. It was time for the Pats' young defence to step up.

Wilson opened with a short pass to LaFell, but the receiver turned right instead of left and the ball sailed by his right shoulder, incomplete. He tried the same play again and La Fell caught it this time, but was immediately wrapped up by Trufant for



a 6-yard gain. On 3<sup>rd</sup> & 4, with four wide-outs in the game, Wilson took it himself on a sweep, but the blocking was non-existent and **Cameron Heyward** took him down in the backfield for a 2-yard loss. Facing 4<sup>th</sup> down & 6, Wilson hit Randle on a curl pattern for an 11-yard gain, but the play was nullified by a holding call on Warmack, whose recent memory of a previous play where things had gone badly prompted him to pull down a charging Shelton by the helmet. Although it was a pretty clear hold, Coach Redding threw up his hands in disbelief on the sideline: “*Come on, you didn’t have to call that!*” he screamed.

Facing 4<sup>th</sup> & 16, with the season on the line, Wilson had the Patriots right where he wanted them. They had taken away the deep ball all afternoon, but this time he would use it to his advantage. The Pats had left the middle of the field wide open on the previous two plays. On top of that, their two safeties were playing deep. Wilson would send his four wide receivers on deep patterns, leaving Fleener as a safety valve. As he had done many times before, he would wait to stretch the secondary out with the deep patterns while drawing the pass rush in with his scrambling ability until a huge gaping hole formed in the middle of the field. When the moment was right, he would take off and run for it. The play was usually good for at least 20 yards and sometimes much more. The ‘Hail Wilson’ he called it and it had answered more than a few Cubs fans’ prayer over the years.

True to the script, Wilson dropped back seven steps and made a show of looking down field while scampering around in the backfield. The Pats defensive backs shadowed the Cubs receivers while the three-man rush tired while trying to track him down. When he could no longer see red jerseys within 20 yards of the line of scrimmage, Wilson took off and headed in the general direction of his tight end Fleener, who was good for a block down field if needed. Needing to reach the 50 yard line it looked to him as he crossed the 40 that he would easily make it and then some. But no sooner had that thought flashed through his mind than, to his horror, he saw Pats’ linebacker **CJ Mosley** appear in front of him after bowling over Fleener like a truck running over a rabbit. The Pats’ defender had cleverly used Fleener as cover until Wilson had committed himself.

Mosley now stood between the elusive Wilson and the Cubs’ season. The Young Gun’s instincts took over, but they told him to go sideways rather than forward, a reaction that Mosley’s instincts told him would be coming. Mosley shadowed Wilson’s lateral movement, with defensive reinforcements moving in. Wilson saw what was happening and instinctively cut back with the intention of charging for the line of gain. But Mosley instinctively anticipated this and cut back at the same time. Both were now committed to their course. Wilson sprinted forward, a touch faster than the linebacker, and Mosley lunged. The Cubs’ QB dodged with his upper body and appeared to get away as Mosley failed to wrap him up. But as the linebacker fell to the ground he stretched and managed to get both hands on Wilson’s right ankle – stopping him just long enough for safety **Mark Barron** to fly in from the side and take him down.

With a deep, slow-motion ‘*NOOOOOOOOOOOOO*,’ Wilson reached out with the football as he fell, stretching as far as he could toward the 50 yard line. To the unbridled joy of Patriots fans, the ball landed with its nose just past the 48 yard line, almost 2 yards shy of the 1<sup>st</sup> down. The whistle blew. The clock stopped at 0:59. No flags. It was all but over.

The Old Gunslinger strapped on his helmet one more time and strode onto the field to take up his position at the center of the ‘Victory Formation.’ The Cubs burned their last two timeouts as **Duke Johnson** ran twice for 22 yards and a 1<sup>st</sup> down to make it all academic. Against the odds, the Old Gunslinger had bested the Young Gun at High Noon in Charleswood. There would be *no* new Sheriff in town this week.

### **WHAT KILLED THE DINOSAURS**

And now, we move to that *other* game. You know, the one involving the two best teams in the Can-Am Conference.

First of all, it was not a “game” at all, except in the technical sense of the word, meaning that there was a contest that served as entertainment for at least some of the people in attendance. It would be more apt to call it an “incident” – a rather tragic one – in which one team (Durham) was ritually executed by another (Aurora) in a slow and painful manner by a score of 27-3.

If you were lucky enough to have missed it, all you really need to know about it is the Durham offensive stat line: 3 points scored; 8 first downs; 6 times sacked; 22 minutes T.O.P.; 3 of 14 on 3<sup>rd</sup> down attempts, and 113 net yards of offence. To put that in grim perspective (or to add an amusing twist if you are a Cowtown or Markham fan and hate the Lizards), Mustangs running back **Arian Foster** had 265 total yards of offence all by himself and scored the game’s only two touchdowns. While Foster is emerging as the front-runner for playoff MVP, he could not have done as well in this game without a lot of help from the Dinosaurs, who missed 11 tackles, most of them coming on attempts to corral the bucking Mustang.

The Lizards were never in this game unless one counts the coin toss. They did force a turnover on Aurora’s opening drive, but it was quickly squandered by the first of five Durham three-and-outs on the day. They also had a two-and-out, a couple of one-play drives, a 5-play, and a 6-play drive to go along with a 9-play possession in the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter than ended with **Drew Brees** getting intercepted by **Josh Norman**. Depending on who you talk to, it was either a hideous display of offence by the Lizards or a completely dominant performance by the all pro-laden defence of the Mustangs. Having watched the game – reluctantly – I can attest that it was a combination of both. But if I had to both ascribe blame and give credit I would lay the offensive flop at the ten feet of the Durham offensive line and credit the Aurora secondary for giving Brees few options in the passing game and leaving him at the mercy of **JJ Watt** and **Cliff Avril**.

The question now is: will his ignominious exit from the playoffs affect the status of **Drew Brees** in MVP voting? The vote is supposed to reflect regular season performance but, human nature being imperfect, post-season play can sometimes influence the writers. Especially when the last performance any of them witnessed was a 100-yard passing game, 5 sacks taken



and a pitiful 41.1QB rating. Much will depend on who else is on the ballot. To find out, read on.....

### **MVP SEARCH**

Now is that time when members of the Affiliated Press (AP) must consider who the two best players were during the past regular season. The approved ballot is out with simply the names, the team, and the position played. Not much to go on if you slept through the season. But as a public service to my colleagues and those watching at home, I offer you my take on this year's best:

As usual, quarterbacks dominate the offensive MVP ballot:

**Drew Brees (DTL)** – On a team without a dependable running threat this born again starter endured temperamental protection from his offensive line to post league highs in QB rating (111.6) and TD passes (38). 4,336 yards passing (3<sup>rd</sup>), 381 pass completions (2<sup>nd</sup>) and an interception percentage of just 1.3% (3<sup>rd</sup>) round out one of the more impactful performances of the season at QB.

**Russell Wilson (ICC)** – Impressive passing numbers that included a QB rating of 108.4 (3<sup>rd</sup>), 29 TD passes and a league best 1.0% interception rate fail to tell the whole story of a breakout year for Iowa City's young gun. Wilson also led all quarterbacks with 524 yards rushing and an eye-popping 10 TDs. His presence meant the Cubs were never out of any game.

**Peyton Manning (CHP)** – No MVP ballot would be complete without this perennial all-star. He may have lost some zip on his fastball, but pinpoint accuracy (70.1% completion rate) resulted in a 109.3 QB rating (2<sup>nd</sup>), 32 TD passes and a 15-win season.

**Matt Ryan (AUR)** – The Mustangs continued to rely on his arm to generate points this year and he delivered, with league highs in pass completions (398) and passing yards (4,812). He also served up 37 TD passes to spearhead a 15-win season and a Division title.

**Antonio Brown (TCT)** – If teammate Jay Cutler gets any write-in votes for MVP it will be because of this deft and speedy wide receiver. Brown led the league with 120 receptions, averaging 13.4 yards per catch and hauling in 75% of his targets. He also led all non-kickers in scoring with 20 TDs, 19 through the air and 1 on a punt return. He kept TC triumphant and that's all you can ask.

**BEST OF THE REST: LeSean McCoy** of Gwinnett won the rushing title with 1,849 yards and led the league in total yards from scrimmage with 2,062. **Arian Foster** kept the short game alive in bombs-away Aurora and lit the scoreboard with 1,820 total yards from scrimmage and 18 TDs. Mohave's **Julio Jones** caught 109 passes, led all receivers with 1,787 yards and snared 11 TDs in a heroic but futile effort to save Andrew Luck's horrible season. Fans in Carthage are ready to build a bronze statue of **Marcus Mariota** for his 37 TD passes and for leading one of the worst teams in football to 6 wins. If a lineman could be an MVP, **Tyron Smith** of Iowa City would be it – he is credited with opening 42 big holes and allowing no sacks on the no.1 ranked offence.

On the defensive side, one team deservedly dominates the ballot:

**JJ Watt (AUR)** – He led the league with 18 sacks and 128 sack yards and added 23 QB hurries (tied for 2<sup>nd</sup>) while facing steady double and triple teams. He even deflected 16 passes (3<sup>rd</sup> in the league), more than most CBs. He notched 69 tackles, 9 run stuffs and 3 forced fumbles to round out a gawdy resume. His side of the field was a practical “no-go” zone for most offences.

**Richard Sherman (DTL)** – This shutdown corner saw only 43 targets all year, creating an interdiction zone in the Durham defence. Opposing QBs learned their lesson last year, but when they did pass in his direction, they did so at a 55% rate.

**Eric Weddle (AUR)** – One half of the Mustangs' All-Pro middle secondary, he led the league in passes defended with 22 and tied for 2<sup>nd</sup> in interceptions with 5. He racked up 63 tackles and a paltry 47% of passes in his direction found their targets.

**Earl Thomas (AUR)** – The other half of Aurora's All-Pro middle secondary snared 4 interceptions, landed 46 tackles and deflected 9 passes. His numbers weren't gawdy, but he held opposing QBs to a 48% completion rate and his presence was felt on every play.

**CJ Mosley (CHP)** – The second-year ILB was an all-around dominant force in the middle of the Patriots' D and a playmaker in the clutch. He finished tied for 7<sup>th</sup> in tackles with 110 and excelled at both the blitz (14 pressures) and pass coverage (2 INTs).

**BEST OF THE REST: Connor Barwin** was a sack machine for the Knights, finishing with 16 and forcing 5 fumbles to evoke forgotten memories of a once-dominant 'Blue Shield.' **Mario Williams** was the main man on a fearsome Iowa defensive front four; drawing double teams and still managing 11 sacks, 14 pressures, 8 run stuffs and 59 tackles. **Khalil Mack** of the Monarchs made a lot of noise on a quiet team with 10 sacks, 8 pressures, 12 run stuffs, 75 tackles and 3 forced fumbles. **Luke Kuechly** was the model stay-at-home inside linebacker in a stay-at-home Regulator defence. He compiled 116 tackles, 9 run stuffs, 2 INTs and an impressive 18 pass deflections. Finally, if an interior lineman can be an MVP, Cowtown's **Marcell Dareus** played the position better than anyone, bringing both pass rush and run clogging to bear with 7 sacks, 12 pressures, 3 pass deflections and 47 tackles.

## **BUG THE BOOKIE!**

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# JIMMY'S CHAMPIONSHIP PICK

At 'His Majesty the King's Royal Coliseum' in Mission Viejo, California

## AURORA @ CHARLESWOOD (line – MUSTANGS by 3)

**INJURIES:** Aurora – None; Charleswood – None.

**BACKGROUND:** The teams did not face each other during the 2015 regular season but they posted identical 15-1 records – tops in their respective Conferences. They have faced each other only twice since Garland/Aurora entered the league in 2008, splitting the series 1-1. Neither of those games was close, the loser in both cases being decidedly inferior to the victor at the time. They have no playoff history. Both teams have won an EFL Championship – the Mustangs last year in 2014 and the Pats the year before in 2013.

**WHEN CHARLESWOOD HAS THE BALL:** The Patriots employed a balanced attack during the regular season that tended to be on the conservative side. This is not a surprise, since they often got an early lead and sat on it against the inferior competition in their Division. In the playoffs they have so far continued in a conservative vein, taking very few chances in games where attempting to maintain ball control was part of their winning strategy. Don't expect much to change against the league's no.1 ranked defence. The Pats will aim to balance the run and the short passing game in order to set up 3<sup>rd</sup> & manageable and keep the chains moving. They don't have to score on every possession to be successful as long as they are able to keep the Aurora defence on the field. Their aim will be to eventually wear them down and make them more susceptible to missed tackles and the big play. Expect to see more of Lamar Miller than Duke Johnson and more of Andre Johnson than Dez Bryant, at least in the early going. At some point, Peyton will take his shots downfield, but don't expect it to be a frequent occurrence, since there is no more deadly center of a secondary than Aurora's Eric Weddle and Earl Thomas and the Pats line is susceptible to pass rush pressure on the right side. Those star safeties will likely limit the contribution of Jason Witten as well. The Mustangs have plenty of options on defence but may be content to sit back early and let the superior athleticism and motor of superstar JJ Watt disrupt the timing of the offence. If they get a two-score lead, expect them to quickly lose respect for the Charleswood running game and unleash the dogs.

**WHEN AURORA HAS THE BALL:** The Mustangs will want to test volatile corner Aqib Talib with shots down field to Anquan Boldin, but don't expect to see as much of their signature long hitch play in this game as you have seen before. The team that passed the ball over 60% of the time in the regular season has found more success in the playoffs running the ball with Arian Foster. Foster has not only been running like an all-pro, he has been highly effective as both an outlet and target receiver in the passing game. Expect a heavy dose of Foster out of the two-tight end set against a Charleswood defence that has been getting gashed on the ground so far in the post-season. When not in their "heavy" formation, expect the Horses to by-pass the Basic Pro Set and spread the field with 4 and 5 wide receiver sets. They normally do this to exploit a lack of secondary depth in opponents, but it will likely be less effective here due to the strength of Charleswood's nickel and dime corners. The Pats may have no choice but to commit to stopping the run and trust their corners, Desmond Trufant and Talib, to hold Matt Ryan at bay.

**THE WAY I SEE IT:** Both teams were indisputably the best in their respective conferences, but the Mustangs remain a cut above. This is primarily because of their defence, which has been especially dominant lately, holding opponents to an average of 3 yards per play in the post-season. The offence has shown both versatility and the capacity to make highly effective in-game adjustments to neutralize opponents' strategies. They are a confident team with fresh experience on the big stage. It is their game to lose and I do not expect them to give anything away. If the Pats are to pull off an upset they will have to take it away with superior play. The one clear advantage they have is at quarterback, where Peyton Manning has been an assassin at short and medium range. Give him time to throw and he could be just as deadly stretching the field to Dez Bryant and Sammy Watkins. Offensive line play will be key to a Pats win, but they will be fighting uphill all the way against an accomplished and menacing defensive front four. The Pats are also a balanced team on both sides of the ball that, while lacking the star power of the Mustangs on defence, have few weaknesses and no fatal flaws. It is no accident that they are in the final game. The three-point line is just about right, maybe too right. Barring a string of Pats turnovers brought on by big-game jitters, there is a good chance the game will be decided by a late field goal either way. Who will be kicking that field goal? Don't be surprised if it is Nick Folk who sends Aurora to its second straight EFL Championship. **PICK: AURORA**

