

2015

Week One


EFL NEWS
 ELITE FOOTBALL LEAGUE

2015

Week One

October 12, 2015



CAR	14	MOH	19	LAK	10	CHI	17	ICC	21	DTL	22	COW	10	SBE	0	AUR	41	GWG	27
TCT	30	VIR	14	CHP	20	BCR	24	MVM	23	PIC	7	MAR	37	YOR	0	SC	10	SBE	24



Jeremy Maclin of the Gladiators dives toward the pylon as Swordfish safety *Patrick Chung* looks on helplessly. Maclin's 3rd touchdown was a game-saver, sending the Week One contest into overtime and an eventual Gwinnett victory, 27-24, over Sebastian. (Story Inside....)

LATEST EFL NEWS INSIDE

- GLADS ESCAPE FISH TANK
- NORTH STARS MAUL KINGS
- RUSTY BRES GETS A WIN
- MUSTANGS KEEP GALLOPING
- BLUE EAGLES COME BACK
- MONARCHS CROWN CUBBIES
- AND MORE.....

Also in this issue

- SPATS FEATURE, 'EFL ASIA'
- THE RETURN
- FALSE START
- DROWNING IN SUCCESS
- THIS WEEK IN THE EFL HISTORY



Who was slick in Week One?

"BRYLCREEM" THE EFL'S FIRST SPONSOR



Jeremy Maclin
WR
 Gwinnett
 Gladiators

14 catches, 253 yds, 18.1 avg., 3 TDs
 One-man offence in passing game.



Terrell Suggs
OLB
 Scarborough
 Blue Eagles

6 tackles, 1 sack, 1 PD, 1 INT. His pick set up game-winning FG.



1-0-0



GAME OF THE WEEK



0-1-0

Ginnett

27

MVP

Jeremy Maclin

24

Sebastian

TEAM LEADERS

Passing	Cmp	Att	Yds	TD
Big Ben	32	45	456	3
Rushing	Car	Yds	Avg	TD
McCoy	22	92	4.2	0
Receiving	Rec	Yds	Avg	TD
Maclin	14	253	18.1	3

Team	1	2	3	4	OT	Total
Gwinnett	7	3	0	14	3	27
Sebastian	0	7	10	7	0	24

TEAM LEADERS

Passing	Cmp	Att	Yds	TD
Dalton	26	38	331	2
Rushing	Car	Yds	Avg	TD
Anderson	21	101	4.8	0
Receiving	Rec	Yds	Avg	TD
Anderson	2	82	41.0	0

Play of the Game

With 0:08 left in the game, **Big Ben** found **Jeremy Maclin** for a 21-yard TD pass the score at 24. The play sent the game into OT and allowed the Glads to pull out the victory.

SUMMARY: The favoured Gladiators looked strong early, shutting down the first three Sebastian drives while posting 10 points on a 32-yard TD pass to **Jeremy Maclin** and a **Shane Suisham** FG. A Swordfish 4th down gamble at mid-field paid off as they got on the board 5 plays later with a 4-yard TD pass from **Andy Dalton** to **Odell Beckham**. The Glads drove back on a 63-yard pass to **Reggie Wayne** but came away empty when **LeSean McCoy** was stuffed for a 2-yard loss on 4th and goal at the one-foot line. In the 2nd half the Swordfish were sparked by an 81-yard pass to **CJ Anderson** that set up a 2-yard TD pass to **James Hanna** then a 27-yard pass to Beckham set up **Adam Vinatieri** for a 50-yard FG and a 17-10 Sebastian lead. The Glads tied it early in the 4th on a 1-yard TD pass to Maclin set up by a 27-yard pass to Maclin 2 plays earlier. It remained tied until the 1:41 mark when Dalton scrambled into the end zone from 7 yards out. With 1 timeout left, the Glads started from their 26. **Ben Roethlisberger** threw 9 straight passes, completing 6 and finding Maclin at the pylon from 21 yards out to tie the game with 0:08 left. Sebastian marched to the Gwinnett 14 yard line but controversially went for it on 4th & 2, Anderson was stopped for no gain and the Glads won it with 1:57 left on a chip shot FG.

QUOTES: "We obviously have a lot to work on defensively. Our tackling was very sloppy today! We aren't going to win many games missing that many tackles. Thankfully Big Ben and Jeremy showed a little magic out there to keep us in it." Gwinnett coach, **Dave Birdsall**.

"What did they have, a thousand yards or something? I wanted to end it there without giving them the ball. It didn't work out! But I'd do it again if the same situation came up." Sebastian coach, **Russ Lemmon**, on why he kept his offence on the field on 4th and 2 at Gwinnett's 14 in OT.



HAPPY FAN



titter

ANGRY FAN



PompusMaximusI @PMLmaxxy

Not an inspiring start; at times ugly. Career games from Big Ben and Jeremy needed to beat the Fish!



Aquaman @aquaman

A tragic loss for our tragic team. If only I could telepathically control the football fish as well as the real ones!

10-06-2015 The Fish Tank Temp:4 Wind: None No Line MVP: **Jeremy Maclin**

Scoring Summary

1 7:00	Gwinnett	TD Roethlisberger 32 pass to Maclin (Suisham) (9-83-5:02)	7-0
2 11:06	Gwinnett	FG Suisham 23 (9-80-3:02)	10-0
2 5:32	Sebastian	TD Dalton 4 pass to Beckham Jr. (Vinatieri) (10-80-5:34)	10-7
3 11:44	Sebastian	TD Dalton 2 pass to Hanna (Vinatieri) (3-84-1:40)	10-14
3 2:55	Sebastian	FG Vinatieri 50 (5-34-2:06)	10-17
4 14:16	Gwinnett	TD Roethlisberger 1 pass to Maclin (Suisham) (7-58-3:33)	17-17
4 1:41	Sebastian	TD Dalton 7 run (Vinatieri) (8-63-1:58)	17-24
4 0:08	Gwinnett	TD Roethlisberger 21 pass to Maclin (Suisham) (9-74-1:26)	24-24
5 1:57	Gwinnett	FG Suisham 21 (9-70-3:19)	27-24

GWG

SS

First Downs	26	27
Rushes	31-131	31-173
Passes	45-32-456	38-26-331
Sacked	1-4	3-29
Fumble	2	1
Penalties	9-88	6-40
Turnovers	1	1
Missed Tackles	12	4
Blitzes	7	20
Time	35:06	37:57
Third Down	7-14	4-15
Fourth Down	1-3	2-4
Red Att/Td/Fg	4/1/2	4/3/0
Net Offense	583	475

Blue 35, Blue 35, hut, hut hut! Red 23, 3, Red 23, 3, hut, hut, hut! Green 49, hut!



CANNIBALS

0-1-0

7	0	7	0	0	14
OT					

Eddie Lacy

17 carries, 89 yards, 1 TD



TRIUMPH

1-0-0

3	17	7	3	0	30

Jay Cutler

19 of 28, 252 yards, 2 TDs, 1 INT

Rookie **Marcus Mariota** scrambled for 24 yards to set up a first-drive TD run by **Eddie Lacy**, giving Carthage the early lead. The rookie struggled from then on, giving up 4 of 5 Cannibals turnovers. But it was Lacy's fumble at his own 23 that got the Triumph started; four plays later **Jay Cutler** found **Antonio Brown** for a TD from 3 yards for a 10-7 lead. Cutler found Brown again for a 12-yard TD after the Cannibals turned it over on downs. A 48-yard pass to **Charles Clay** set up a 4-yard TD run by **Melvin Gordon** to open the 2nd half, making it 27-7. The Triumph cruised the rest of the way.



HELLFIRE

1-0-0

7	3	0	9	0	19
OT					

Andrew Luck

33 of 58, 441 yards, 1 INT



VIOLATORS

0-1-0

0	7	7	0	0	14

Jamaal Charles

18 Carries, 122 yards

A 22-yard pass to **Allen Robinson** keyed a 91-yard Mohave drive that paid off in a 6-yard TD run by **Tevin Coleman** to open the scoring. The Hellfire added a FG before the Violators' offence woke up with a 54-yard run by **Jamaal Charles**, setting up a 1-yard TD run by **Mark Ingram** before halftime. With Mohave threatening in the Virden red zone in the 3rd, **Trumaine Johnson** turned it around with a 97-yard pick six to give Virden a 14-10 lead. The Hellfire still trailed by 1 with 2:42 left and the ball on their 25. **Andrew Luck** wrapped up a 12-play drive with 1-yard sneak for the game-winning TD.



KNIGHTS

0-1-0

3	0	0	7	0	10
OT					

Le'Veon Bell

30 Carries, 97 yards



PATRIOTS

1-0-0

3	3	0	14	0	20

Dez Bryant

10 Receptions, 184 yards, 2 TDs

Charles Woodson picked off **Peyton Manning** on the Pats' first play, setting up a 53-yard FG by **Patrick Murray** to give LA the early lead. Charleswood drew even with a 51-yard FG by **Ryan Succop** then took the lead on a 21-yard FG to lead 6-3 at half time. The Pats failed on 4th & goal at the Knights' 2 yard line to make it a scoreless 3rd, but a 36-yard TD pass to **Dez Bryant** on the first play of the 4th made it 13-3. A **Lamar Miller** fumble at midfield let LA back in it, setting up a 2-yard TD pass from **Terry Bridgewater** to **Brandin Cooks**. But Bryant soon sealed the Pats' win with a 71-yard TD catch.

Blue 35, Blue 35, hut, hut hut! Red 23, 3, Red 23, 3, hut, hut, hut! Green 49, hut!



CONVICTS

0-1-0

0	0	7	10	0	17
OT					

Cam Newton

17 of 34, 235 yards, 1 TD, 1 INT



RAVENS

1-0-0

3	10	0	11	0	24

Karlos Williams

12 Carries, 99 yards, 1 TD

An interception by **Antrel Rolle** and a 38-yard dash by **Karlos Williams** set up a pair of **Cody Parkey** FGs to put the Ravens in front 6-0. They added a TD before the half on a 21-yard aerial score from **Shaun Hill** to **Randall Cobb**. A pick by **Antoine Bethea** set up a 24-yard TD pass to **Malcom Floyd** to put Chino on the board then a 3-yard TD run by **DeMarco Murray** put them in front 14-13 early in the 4th. Williams put the Ravens back in front with a 12-yard TD run to make it 21-14. Down by 7, the Convicts recovered an onside kick with 1:46 left but were stopped at the Ravens' 10.



T-LIZARDS

1-0-0

0	6	6	10	0	22
OT					

Jocco

24 of 38, 290 yards, 4 TDs, 2 INTs



SPARTANS

0-1-0

0	0	7	0	0	7

Peyanning

29 of 48, 298 yards, 3 TDs, 3 INTs

Phil Dawson broke a scoreless tie in the 2nd with a 31-yard FG then followed it up with two more to give Durham a 9-0 lead. The Spartans scored the game's first major mid-way in the 3rd after two pass interference penalties on the Lizards set up at 16-yard TD pass from **Philip Rivers** to **Golden Tate** to narrow the lead to 9-7. A **Thomas Davis** interception helped set up a 22-yard Dawson FG then a 12-yard punt return by **Devin Hester** gave Durham a short field for Dawson's 5th FG of the day. Durham finally found the end zone late in the 4th quarter after a **Richard Sherman** pick sealed the win.



CORN KINGS

0-1-0

0	3	0	7	0	10
OT					

Joe Flacco

30 of 55, 290 yards, 1 TD, 3 INTs



NORTH STARS

1-0-0

14	14	9	0	0	37

Brandon Marshall

8 Receptions, 100 yards, 1 TD

After thwarting Markham's opening drive with a fumble recovery at their 5 yard line, the Corn Kings gave it back when **Joe Flacco** was picked off by **George Iloka** to set up a 2-yard TD pass from **Alex Smith** to **Brandon Marshall**. The Stars continued to make big plays with **Percy Harvin** scoring on a 43-yard end-around, **Antonio Cromartie** picking off Flacco to set up a 3-yard TD pass from **Eli Manning** to **Anthony Fasano**, and **D'Qwell Jackson** forcing a **Todd Gurley** fumble, recovering it and running 64 yards for a TD to make it 28-0. Cowtown never recovered and the Stars cruised to victory.

Blue 35, Blue 35, hut, hut hut! Red 23, 3, Red 23, 3, hut, hut, hut! Green 49, hut!



REGULATORS

0-1-0

0	3	7	0	0	10
OT					

Tony Romo
 28 of 44, 253 yards, 1 TD, 1 INT



MUSTANGS

1-0-0

14	17	3	7	0	41
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Arian Foster
 17 Carries, 129 yards, 2 TDs

The Mustangs' offence opened the game with 80 and 74-yard drives, both resulting in TDs on 1-yard plunges by **Arian Foster** and rookie **Cameron Artis-Payne**. The Regs answered with a **Justin Tucker** FG only to have **Chris Polk** return the ensuing kick-off 96 yards for a TD. **Julian Edelman** followed with a 99-yard punt return for a TD to make it 28-3 for Aurora early in the 2nd quarter. **AJ Green** caught a 27-yard TD pass from **Tony Romo** for the Regs, but the Mustangs added a pair of **Nick Folk** FGs and Foster found the end zone again from 2 yards out to finish off a convincing blowout.



CUBS

0-1-0

7	7	0	7	0	21
OT					

Jeremy Hill
 15 Carries, 119 yards, 1 TD



MONARCHS

1-0-0

7	7	3	6	0	23
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Chris Ivory
 23 Carries, 120 yards, 2 TDs

The Monarchs' **Chris Ivory** scored TDs on runs on runs of 9 and 16 yards while the Cubs' **Jeremy Hill** ran one in from 7 yards and **Russell Wilson** found **Mike Wallace** in the end zone from 8 yards to round off the scoring in deadlocked first half. The Monarchs ground out a pair of scoring drives in the 2nd half with Ivory and **Joique Bell** combining for 52 yards on a 66-yard FG drive and **Ryan Tannehill** capping a 95-yard drive with a 1-yard TD pass to **Dwayne Bowe** to make it 23-14. The Cubs struck back with a 34-yard TD pass to **Rueben Randle** but the Monarchs held on to run out the clock.



BLUE EAGLES

1-0-0

0	0	7	10	0	17
OT					

Aaron Rodgers
 26 of 47, 326 yards, 2 INTs



EXCALIBURS

0-1-0

14	0	0	0	0	14
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Tom Brady
 23 of 39, 228 yards, 1 TD, 1 INT

The Excabiburs got out to a quick 14-0 lead with a 59-yard punt return TD by **De'Anthony Thomas** and a 44-yard TD pass from **Tom Brady** to **Kelvin Benjamin**, while blanking the Eagles with a red zone interception by safety **Kurt Coleman**. However, the 2nd half belonged to Scarborough, starting with a 50-yard kick return by **Leon Washington** that set up a 3-yard TD run by **Alfred Blue**. Blue scored again from 1 yard after a 62-yard pass to **Mohamed Sanu** put them in the red zone. With 0:33 left, **Terrell Suggs** picked off Brady at the York 46, setting up the game-winning FG with no time left.

WEEK ONE

STANDINGS

East	W	L	T	Pct	Pts	Ave	Opp	Ave	Diff	Home	Div	Conf
Charleswood	1	0	0	1.000	20	20	10	10	10	1 0 0	0 0 0	1 0 0
Mohave	1	0	0	1.000	19	19	14	14	5	0 0 0	1 0 0	1 0 0
Twin Cities	1	0	0	1.000	30	30	14	14	16	1 0 0	1 0 0	1 0 0
Virden	0	1	0	0.000	14	14	19	19	-5	0 1 0	0 1 0	0 1 0
Carthage	0	1	0	0.000	14	14	30	30	-16	0 0 0	0 1 0	0 1 0
West	W	L	T	Pct	Pts	Ave	Opp	Ave	Diff	Home	Div	Conf
Beaufort County	1	0	0	1.000	24	24	17	17	7	1 0 0	1 0 0	1 0 0
Mission Viejo	1	0	0	1.000	23	23	21	21	2	1 0 0	1 0 0	1 0 0
Chino	0	1	0	0.000	17	17	24	24	-7	0 0 0	0 1 0	0 1 0
Iowa City	0	1	0	0.000	21	21	23	23	-2	0 0 0	0 1 0	0 1 0
Los Angeles	0	1	0	0.000	10	10	20	20	-10	0 0 0	0 0 0	0 1 0
North	W	L	T	Pct	Pts	Ave	Opp	Ave	Diff	Home	Div	Conf
Durham	1	0	0	1.000	22	22	7	7	15	0 0 0	1 0 0	1 0 0
Markham	1	0	0	1.000	37	37	10	10	27	1 0 0	1 0 0	1 0 0
Cowtown	0	1	0	0.000	10	10	37	37	-27	0 0 0	0 1 0	0 1 0
Pickering	0	1	0	0.000	7	7	22	22	-15	0 1 0	0 1 0	0 1 0
York	0	1	0	0.000	14	14	17	17	-3	0 1 0	0 0 0	0 1 0
South	W	L	T	Pct	Pts	Ave	Opp	Ave	Diff	Home	Div	Conf
Scarborough	1	0	0	1.000	17	17	14	14	3	0 0 0	0 0 0	1 0 0
Aurora	1	0	0	1.000	41	41	10	10	31	1 0 0	1 0 0	1 0 0
Gwinnett	1	0	0	1.000	27	27	24	24	3	0 0 0	1 0 0	1 0 0
South Carolina	0	1	0	0.000	10	10	41	41	-31	0 0 0	0 1 0	0 1 0
Sebastian	0	1	0	0.000	24	24	27	27	-3	0 1 0	0 1 0	0 1 0

PASSING

Rk	Name	Team	Att	Cmp	C%	Yards	In	I%	Lg	TD	TD%	Rate
1	Roethlisberger	GWG	45	32	71.1	456	0	0	63	3	6.7	125.8
2	Wilson, R	ICC	15	9	60	116	0	0	34	2	13.3	123.9
3	Manning, E	MAR	16	12	75	125	0	0	27	1	6.3	118.0
4	Dalton	SS	38	26	68.4	331	0	0	81	2	5.3	112.9
5	Tannehill	MVM	29	23	79.3	230	0	0	43	1	3.4	111.2
6	Cutler	TCT	28	19	67.9	252	1	3.6	48	2	7.1	105.1
7	Manning, P	CHP	42	25	59.5	324	1	2.4	71	2	4.8	89.8
8	Brees	DTL	42	31	73.8	284	1	2.4	25	1	2.4	89.8
9	Ryan, M	AUR	21	14	66.7	218	1	4.8	42	0	0	81.1
10	Romo	SC	44	28	63.6	253	1	2.3	27	1	2.3	77.2
11	Luck	MOH	58	33	56.9	441	1	1.7	28	0	0	74.0
12	Brady, T	YOR	39	23	59	228	1	2.6	44	1	2.6	73.5
13	Newton, C	CHI	34	17	50	235	1	2.9	56	1	2.9	70.1
14	Bridgewater	LAK	21	9	42.9	77	0	0	13	1	4.8	68.9
15	Hill, S	BCR	31	16	51.6	165	1	3.2	21	1	3.2	64.6

RUSHING

Rk	Player	Team	Att	Yds	Ave	Lg	TD
1	Foster, A	AUR	17	129	7.6	34	2
2	Charles, J	VV	18	122	6.8	54	0
3	Ivory	MVM	23	120	5.2	18	2
4	Hill, J	ICC	15	119	7.9	30	1
5	Gordon, M	TCT	16	116	7.3	26	1
6	Miller, L	CHP	14	107	7.6	20	0
7	Anderson, C	SS	21	101	4.8	16	0
8	William, Ka	BCR	12	99	8.3	38	1
9	Bell, L	LAK	30	97	3.2	23	0
10	McCoy, L	GWG	22	92	4.2	40	0
11	Murray, D	CHI	23	92	4	12	1
12	Lacy	CAR	17	89	5.2	16	1
13	Forte	PIC	21	88	4.2	13	0
14	Coleman, T	MOH	16	73	4.6	12	1
15	Bernard, G	YOR	16	69	4.3	22	0
16	Gore	SC	13	67	5.2	20	0
17	Mariota	CAR	6	64	10.7	24	0
18	Stewart	BCR	17	61	3.6	8	0
19	Rodgers, J	SC	10	60	6	16	0
20	Gurley	COW	14	59	4.2	12	0

RECEIVING

Rk	Player	Team	No	Yds	Ave	Lg	TD
1	Maclin	GWG	14	253	18.1	36	3
2	Bryant, D	CHP	10	184	18.4	71	2
3	Jones, J	MOH	9	144	16	28	0
4	Kelce, T	CAR	8	67	8.4	16	0
5	Decker	DTL	8	68	8.5	12	0
6	Johnson, C	DTL	8	104	13	25	1
7	Hilton	DTL	8	66	8.3	13	0
8	Marshall, B	MAR	8	100	12.5	27	1
9	Douglas, H	MOH	8	118	14.8	23	0
10	Benjamin	YOR	7	102	14.6	44	1
11	Garcon	SBE	7	63	9	11	0
12	Nelson, J	SBE	7	80	11.4	16	0
13	Landry, J	GWG	7	62	8.9	14	0
14	Evans, M	COW	7	83	11.9	19	0
15	Jackson, V	TCT	6	92	15.3	26	0
16	Cobb	BCR	6	74	12.3	21	1
17	Bowe	MVM	6	99	16.5	43	1
18	Woods, R	MOH	6	73	12.2	22	0
19	Brown, A	TCT	6	62	10.3	15	2
20	Smith Sr.	COW	6	67	11.2	13	0

KICKING

Rk	Player	Team	FGA	FGM	FG%	40	50	Lg	Pts
1	Dawson	DTL	5	5	100	2	0	42	16
2	Brown, J	MAR	3	3	100	1	1	54	13
3	Gostkowski	TCT	3	3	100	1	0	47	12
4	Folk	AUR	2	2	100	2	0	48	11
5	Parkey	BCR	3	3	100	1	0	40	10
6	Suisham	GWG	3	2	66.7	0	0	23	9
7	Succop	CHP	3	2	66.7	1	1	51	8
8	Janikowski	MOH	3	2	66.7	0	0	33	7
9	Vinatieri	SS	1	1	100	1	1	50	6
10	Bailey, D	CHI	2	1	50	1	0	49	5
11	Carpenter	MVM	1	1	100	1	0	43	5
12	Nugent	SBE	1	1	100	1	0	40	5
13	Novak	COW	1	1	100	0	0	34	4
14	Murray, P	LAK	1	1	100	1	1	53	4
15	Tucker, J	SC	1	1	100	1	0	46	4
16	Zuerlein	ICC	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
17	Crosby	VV	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
18	Hauschka	CAR	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
19	Walsh	YOR	1	0	0	0	0	0	2
20	Scobee	PIC	0	0	0	0	0	0	1



AROUND THE



With Spats McChad

NEW YORK – I have moved away from “extreme” and remote holiday destinations during the football off-season. Originally intended to recharge my batteries, I found I was spending too much time recovering from them. My encounter with a rabid honey badger on a safari in Kenya was a turning point.

You can see the beginning of that unfortunate experience on a video recently posted on YouTube by my “old friend” Bentley, who I used to prank with at Cornell back in the day. He managed to capture and post what he called “the funny part” – the part where I react to the honey badger bursting into my tent to get at a honeycomb that Bentley had placed inside while I was sleeping. The dangerous part – the part where the honey badger tears apart the rest of our camp and mauls one of our local guides – is a total blur as Bentley drops his camera in the mad scramble to get inside the land rover. You can, however, hear the guide screaming just before the video is cut short.

I decided it would be safer and more intellectually stimulating to combine my passion for history with my off-season travels. My first destination was, of course, an obvious one: Taiwan, the burial place of my childhood hero **Chiang Kai-Shek**, who I had come to admire, in the course of working on a school project on communism, as a staunch anti-communist. Coincidentally, years later I would meet the secretary to the curator of the *Chiang Kai-Shek Memorial Hall*, **Vivian Ping**, at a luncheon and we hit it off immediately. I impressed her with my in-depth knowledge of the Northern Expedition and my defence of the *White Terror*, on both pragmatic and moral grounds. Soon, we were “in love,” but it did not last long time. She returned to Taipei that week and I returned to bar-hopping, eventually forgetting my promise to visit her in “the true China.”

I had lost her card but was able to track her down, with some difficulty, on InLinks. She had married a guy name Victor Pong and she was now **Vivian Ping-Pong**. She agreed to meet me for lunch, “nothing more,” and bring me to see the new football stadium. I was surprised to hear there was a football stadium in Taiwan. She, in turn, sounded surprised and laughed as she said: “Spats, I thought you write about football for a job! You don’t know the Sharks? That’s funny!”

Apparently, while I was running for my life from a honey badger in Kenya, the EFL had made it official: the league was expanding to Asia!

EFL ASIA

The rumours of an EFL expansion into Asia had been treated as a joke by most commentators and journalists, including me. A few of my myriad sources inside the league had given me the heads up as early as the 2014 pre-season that an Asian developmental league was in the works, but the idea seemed far-fetched and, if true, unlikely to happen any time soon. Part of what made the rumours unbelievable was the entire premise of the league, which aimed to pit traditional political foes against each other in an experimental season that would directly impact the EFL’s North American expansion in 2016. The other part was the complete lack of an American-style football culture in the region, save for a small but fanatical group of Markham North stars supporters in Guangdong Province in mainland China. Like that time in the 80’s when the CFL expanded into the US market it sounded like an off the wall idea. Even as I saw the evidence for myself during my visit to Taiwan, I had trouble absorbing the reality.

Kaohsiung Stadium in Taiwan (aka ‘National Stadium’) is a sleek, modern facility with a seating capacity of 55,000. It was built in 2009 for the World Games and is only the second stadium in the world, after Mohave’s Fiery Depths, to run on solar power. It has been used exclusively for soccer-style football games but now has been re-fitted to accommodate American-style football games. It is the home of the Taipei Sharks EFL Asia franchise, the second of four teams to come on board EFL Asia for the 2015 season.

Taipei’s main and only rival in the China Division is the Beijing Red Dragons People’s Football Club. They play in Worker’s Stadium, a creek concrete cavern built in 1959 in celebration of the 10th anniversary of the People’s Republic. The stadium seats 66,000 and has been structurally reinforced and the field resurfaced to meet EFL stadium standards.

In the Korea Division, the leaders of North and South Korea concluded a landmark agreement to bring their stagnant military conflict to the football field. The Seoul Calm will represent the democratic South and the Pyongyang Sun the autocratic North. The Calm will play out of all-purpose Jamsil Olympic Stadium and are expected to attract thousands of US Servicemen in addition curious locals. The Sun will play out of Kim Il-Sung Stadium and can expect to have 70,000 grey-



Supreme Leader **Kim Jong-un** supervises upgrades to Kim Il-Sung Stadium in Pyongyang in preparation for the debut of the Pyongyang Sun, the EFL Asia team based in North Korea. “All these seats should be brighter red,” he was reportedly telling his staff in this photo.

shirted party faithful at each and every game, whether they want to go or not.

The intransigence of the conflict between the Koreans was at the center of all doubts that EFL Asia could take hold in the way originally envisioned by **Member No. 9**, the V-P of marketing on the secretive EFL Committee that controls the league. Local rivalries sell tickets in any sport, so the idea was to build on local Asian rivalries to jumpstart interest and ticket sales. In terms of rivalries, however, the hostility between the Koreans makes the feud between the Hatfields and the McCoy's look like a birthday party. Over a million war dead is hard to reconcile with, for example, the enmity between the Greek Factions which control the Durham Thunder Lizards and the Pickering Spartans. Nevertheless, these sworn enemies will attempt to get at each other through mostly North American-

born former semi-pro players wearing the jerseys of their sponsor countries.

The teams and the infrastructure are in place for EFL Asia to take off in 2015, but there is one more interesting twist to this far-fetched marketing scheme. The outcome of the EFL Asia season will apparently determine the draft order for the EFL expansion franchises in 2016! This is expected to be announced formally by the league when the four new franchises are officially introduced in Canton in a pre-game ceremony before the Week Three Thursday Night Football match-up between Durham and Gwinnett. Each of the EFL expansion teams will have a “sister” EFL Asia franchise to which their draft fate is tied. Each team will have a measure of control over the sister team, but exactly what constitutes “control” has not been made public.

Whether or not EFL Asia will survive its first year or degenerate for lack of interest or for political reasons remains to be seen. It will be a curiosity for sure, and a memorabilia farm for the sports collectibles buffs looking to stock future rarities.

THE RETURN

By now you are probably sick of reading about the return of **Peyton Manning** to Charleswood but it remains one of the big stories of 2015, one that will likely grow as the Patriots march toward the post-season as many predict they will. Patriot Place was jammed to the rafters for their home opener against the Los Angeles Knights. The schedule-maker could hardly have teed up a softer touch for the ‘Manning Homecoming,’ one practically guaranteed to get the good times rolling in Charleswood early. But if the Knights were supposed to be a punching bag they proved to be a heavy one.

All's well that ends well, according to the old saying. But if Pats games keep ending like this one, against their so-called “easy” opponents, the optimism that inspired this town to have a season-opening ‘Victory Parade’ to symbolize the start of the long journey to the 9th Gale Sayers Game in Mission Viejo will turn into the kind of quiet, corrosive pessimism that only heartbroken Charleswood fans can pull off when things aren't going as well as expected for their team. Pats fans don't get really angry like most; they just get really disappointed, their pouty frowns and stiff countenances set like stone carvings in stubborn resistance to the brightly-lit appeals from the scoreboard to “**MAKE SOME NOISE**” when their defence needs to make a stand, or the offence is about to take the field for an important drive.

The players, the networks and the TV audience got a taste of that kind of Pat fan more than once during the Week One tilt between the Patriots and the Knights. The first time was after Peyton was picked off by **Charles Woodson** on his very first play from scrimmage as a returning Patriot. The decibel level went from 122 to 61 in 0.4 seconds according to *FanFrenzy* – a noise measuring service employed by the league to identify its loudest fan base (with the aim of eventually marketing a Twelfth Man myth in that city that will encourage imitators, increase fan interest, and eventually make attending games unbearable without earplugs). For those who read the signs, it was a particularly inauspicious way to start the season.

A similar decibel drop was registered early in the 2nd quarter after **Connor Barwin** sacked Peyton on 3rd and 8, forcing a fumble that, fortunately, Peyton was able to cover up. At the time, the Pats were tied 3-3 and Manning had 44 yards of passing offence to go along with an interception. When **Ryan Succop** missed a 52-yard field goal attempt to end the 1st half, a smattering of boos could be heard, an extremely rare event at Patriot Place, one roughly equivalent, in relative terms, to fans rioting in Scarborough.

However, the quiet disappointment of Pats fans reached an unofficial record low 35 decibels at the end of the opening drive of the 2nd half, when, on 4th and goal from the 2, Manning threw to an open space in the end zone, unoccupied by any player, to turn the ball over to the Knights on downs. It was 6-3 for Charleswood at the time and the unspoken fear eating away at the wavering morale of the Patriot “faithful” was finally voiced by network TV announcer, **Jim Prantz** when he said: *“If Peyton keeps missing targets like this he could be staring at a very embarrassing home loss in front of this sellout crowd that came here expecting to see something else entirely, I’m sure.”*

Certainly, Peyton had not looked like any version of Peyton previously seen in or out of Charleswood. Could the cool and determined veteran have actually been nervous? Overanxious? Too eager to please his adoring fans? While Peyton struggled, the Charleswood defence dominated a strictly conservative LA offense that sought to move the ball by using a heavy dose of **Le’Veon Bell** and short passes, none more than 10 yards in the air. With over 30 hand-offs, and the Pats keying on Bell, the idea of a play-action pass to **Jordan Matthews**, their best wide receiver, did not seem to enter into the mind of **Jeff Dohn**. And so the Knights plodded along, well outside of the Patriots’ red zone, hoping for some kind of miracle to get them into scoring position.

With the Knights playing not to turn the ball over, it was only a matter of time before somebody on the Charleswood offence made a play. It came on the first play of the 4th quarter when **Dez Bryant** snatched a short slant from Manning, made **JJ Wilcox** miss then ran over Woodson into the clear for a 36-yard TD. It was a play that few receivers in this league can make – a combination of sure hands, speed, power and violent determination. But this was Peyton’s day, and so to him went the accolades.

Phil Mimms, sharing the booth with Prantz, wasted no time weighing in with his expert analysis: *“This play was all Peyton,”* he raved as the roar of the crowd reached 132 decibels. *“As a veteran, he knows he has to hit Dez Bryant in stride or else the safety is going to make a play on him.”* As the slow-motion replay ran on the screen, he expanded, *“And even though he throws the ball a little bit behind him, he is aware that Bryant is one of the best receivers in the league and can adjust to that throw. And you can see that Bryant makes a nice grab that allows him to turn his body slightly back then forward in a way that the safety Wilcox, isn’t expecting, and he misses the tackle. Just a great job by Peyton there!”*

With the ice broken and the crowd alive again, the dark mood lifted from the stadium. The Pats offence continued to struggle, **Lamar Miller** fumbled away the ball near mid-field, **Le’Veon Bell** finally broke a big run of 23 yards, and the Knights got their miracle touchdown three plays later on a 2-yard pass from **Terry Bridgewater** to **Brandin Cooks** to make it 13-10, Pats, with 2:40 left in the game. But it did not seem to matter as much to the home crowd. Peyton was back and they weren’t going to lose. Peyton promptly threw another short slant to Bryant and this time he hit him in stride. It went for 71 yards and the game-clinching touchdown and pushed the decibel meter up to 133 in Patriot Place. As if the outcome was never in doubt.

Thus concludes ‘The Return,’ Chapter One of the book on the 2015 Patriots season.

FALSE START

Soon after the Patriots celebrated their first win of the 2015 season, their expected main challenger in the PAC, the Iowa City Cubs, took to the field at HMK Royal Coliseum in Mission Viejo expecting an easy stroll to victory. Their day would not end as expected, and the outcome – a 23-21 win for the Monarchs – has since touched off a media war in the State of Iowa between sports writers who support Cubs coach, **Deron Redding** and those are calling for his head.

At the center of the controversy is the number of healthy scratches announced by Redding before the game. They included lineman **Muhammad Wilkerson** and running back **Dexter McCluster**, among others, 6 in all. Already under fire for keeping just 6 defensive linemen on the roster, voluntarily scratching Wilkerson was, for lack of a better term, a head-scratcher. With the Monarchs controlling the ball for over 38 minutes, grinding out 28 first downs and 428 yards of offence, those who are less than charitable towards the legendary celebrity of Iowa football are seizing the opportunity to blame him entirely for the loss.

At the head of the “head-hunters” is cranky old **Archibald Thacker** of the *Des Moines Register*, a severe critic of Redding beginning in 2012, when the Cubs suffered through a 1-15 season that appeared, in Thacker’s view, to be self-inflicted.

“One must ask how the supposedly best defensive line in football gives up over 200 yards on the ground to the lowly Monarchs,” writes Thacker in his article entitled, ‘Coach – What Coach?’ *“The answer is simple: they were tired. By the end of the 2nd quarter they were already giving up big runs to journeymen like Joique Bell and Bernard Pierce, missing tackles they had made easily in the pre-season. Did they adjust to this? Absolutely not. They set up repeatedly in a 3-4 zone and got run over.”*

The venerable Cubs beat reporter, **Sparky McGillicuddy**, was much kinder in the fallout from the loss: *“What we witnessed Sunday was a Monarchs team that is a lot better than advertised – a team with unheralded power and coordination in their offensive front five. We also witnessed an unprecedented savvy game plan from the Monarchs that kept a well-coached, talented defence on the field, off balance, and which drew the hidden talent out of **Ryan Tannehill**.”*

When a debate becomes polarized, the truth is somewhere in the middle. The Monarchs played well above most people’s expectations and caught the Cubs flat-footed partly due to Redding’s decision to sit out one quarter of his starters; that decision sent the wrong message to both teams. It’s tough to win any game in the EFL and the Cubs learned that the hard way.

DROWNING IN SUCCESS

At The Fish Tank in Sebastian, the Swordfish played like sharks trying to defend their home field against the much-improved Gladiators. Perhaps it was the rare appearance of their seldom-donned blue jersey that inspired an elevated team spirit, or maybe the Glads took the game for granted, but whatever the cause, **Russ Lemmon’s** squad came close to pulling off a big upset. When

Andy Dalton scrambled for a 7-yard TD to take a 24-17 lead with 1:41 left, the near sellout crowd was imbued with exceptional optimism, misplaced as it turned out to be. **Big Ben** responded in the only way he knows – by shredding the Sebastian secondary for 74 yards and delivering a perfect pass to **Jeremy Maclin** for a 21-yard game-tying touchdown with 8 seconds left.

The late Glads drive was disheartening for both fans and players of the home squad. But hope was renewed when, in overtime, the Fish swam up the field on the first possession of the extra frame and glided deep into Gwinnett territory on runs of 15 and 16 yards by **CJ Anderson**. They crossed the 20 and into the red zone on 3rd and 8 but came up 2 yards short of the first down at the 14 yard line. Amazingly, Lemmon kept his offence on the field, passing up an opportunity to kick a field goal and score first by gambling on 4th and 2. Anderson was stonewalled at the line, turning the ball over on downs. Sebastian fans, accustomed to having their hearts trampled, were stunned.

It would turn out to be ironic that the Fish held the Glads to a three-and-out on the next series. Sebastian got another chance, but a 12-yard sack of Dalton by **Tommy Kelly** turned 2nd and long into 3rd and unmanageable. Soon the Fish were punting for what would be the final time. Four completions for 64 yards, including a 31-yarder to Maclin, put the Glads into position to end the marathon. With 1:57 remaining, **Shaun Suisham** booted a chip shot from 21 yards out to put the Fish back in their place.

The aftermath for Coach Lemmon was a severe as it gets for East Coast Florida football. Unaccustomed to fans caring very much, he seemed caught off guard when challenged by journalist, **Jean Boisvert** of the *Swampland Proof*.

“To be frank, Jean, I didn’t think we could stop their offence,” Lemmon candidly replied to Boisvert’s question about the 4th and 2 call. “Look at the numbers – we hadn’t stopped them all day. I felt we needed a touchdown to stay in the game.”

It may have been an honest answer, but according to *Media Relations 101* it was the wrong answer. The Florida headlines blared so much the next day: ‘SWORDFISH DEFENCE A LEMMON?’, trumpeted the *Swampland Proof*. ‘LEMMON SOUR ON D!’ proclaimed the Miami Herald. How the Swordfish defence responds will be watched closely in the coming weeks.

AROUND THE EFL

Week One usually brings some surprising results as teams shed their pre-season camouflage and reveal themselves under live fire. This Week One was no exception.

At the **TERRORDOME** in Virden, the Violated (as the new version of the team has been dubbed by cynical fans) struck a bit of terror into the heart of Bobby Elder as the favoured Hellfire needed a sneak into the end zone from Andrew Luck with 0:56 left to pull out a 19-14 win. Mohave tallied 497 yards of offence, but mediocre field position and two missed 4th down conversion attempts in Violator territory kept them from capitalizing on the scoreboard.

At Thermopylae Stadium in Pickering, the *Hellenic Cultural Centre* and the *Royal Greek Society* were as muted as the game between Greek rivals was stilted. Five field goals from **Phil Dawson** accounted for most of the points as Durham shuffled past Pickering 22-7. **Drew Brees** did not find the end zone until there was 1:46 remaining in the game, sealing the deal with a 12-yard TD pass to **Megatron** as the Spartans sold out to stop the run to try and get the ball back. It was a bleak offensive encore for Durham’s star QB, who was shelved last year for **Nick Foles**. Is his confidence shaken, or is his offensive line really bad?

In a heavy downpour at Camelot, the Excaliburs poured it on early with two big scoring plays – a punt return TD by **De’Anthony Thomas** and a 44-yard TD pass from **Tom Brady** to **Kelvin Benjamin**. And that was it for the Swords’ attack. On the day, Brady & Co. managed only 4 drives of 6 plays or more, with their longest, 14 plays, ending in a missed field goal. The somnolescent York offence gave **Aaron Rodgers** and the Blue Eagles all the time they needed to regroup from a shaky first half. **Mohamed Sanu** broke free across the middle of the field for a 62-yard pass play to set up the tying touchdown in the 4th quarter and **Terrell Suggs** made a game-changing interception with 33 seconds left to set up **Mike Nugent** for a 40-yard game-winning field goal. Rookie runner **TJ Yeldon** was injured in this game and, judging from **Alfred Blue**’s outing, they need him back.

In Beaufort County, **Shaun Hill** got the nod at quarterback for the Ravens and performed like the career back-up he is. He didn’t win the game, but he didn’t lose it either, as the Ravens won their home opener 24-17. The standout for the Beaufort offence was rookie running back **Karlos Williams**, who turned out to be an effective change-of-pace back for **Jonathan Stewart**, breaking some big runs to set up field goals and scoring the go-ahead touchdown on a 12-yard run in the 4th quarter. The Convicts’ offence took time to get rolling, but once they did, they rolled along at the moderate pace we have come to expect from a team without a lot of long range weapons. In the past, this would have been enough, due to their historically robust defence. But the fact that Hill was good enough to hang 24 points on them does not bode well for this year’s version of the ‘Lockdown Crew.’

In Twin Cities, the Triumph won a re-match of last year’s conference quarter final, knocking off last year’s PAC Champs 30-14. **Jay Cutler** looked markedly better against the rebuilding version of the Cannibals, but he did throw an interception for old time’s sake. The network worked hard to pump up this game for Thursday Night Football ratings, but it was impossible not to notice that the 2015 version of Carthage is but a distant, and sickly relative of last year’s Cinderella.

We wrap up the round up with two games that got out of control early and stayed that way. In Markham, the North Stars took advantage of 3 Corn Kings turnovers and a beautifully executed 43-yard end-around by **Percy Harvin** to jump out to a quick 28-0 lead. They took the foot off the accelerator and finished off with a shockingly easy 37-10 victory. In Aurora, the Mustangs reopened old wounds with back-to-back special teams touchdown returns; the first a 96-yard kick return by **Chris Polk**, and the second on a 99-yard punt return by **Julian Edelman**, to supplement an strong offensive showing by **Arian Foster** in a 41-10 shellacking of South Carolina. That makes it win no. 20 for Aurora’s perfect coach, **Rich Liotta**.

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JIMMY'S WEEK TWO PICKS

VIRDEN @ CARTHAGE (line – VIOLATORS by 1)

INJURIES: Virden – Martavis Bryant (OUT); Carthage – None.

The Violators pushed Mohave late into the 4th quarter before falling to Andrew Luck's last minute sneak into the end zone. Conversely, the Cannibals fell apart in the second quarter after a perfect opening series against Twin Cities and never recovered. It is perhaps because of this disparity in Week One performances that the hands-on favourite worst team in the league is actually favoured on the road against another pretty bad team. However, losing to Mohave and losing to Twin Cities are two vastly different things. When so little talent takes the field it is hard to watch and not easy to predict what will happen. But the number one rule when picking in your pool is not to be fooled by appearances when your sample size is just one week. The fundamentals still favour Carthage, in particular the skill players surrounding rookie QB, Marcus Mariota, who are more numerous and, on balance, more dangerous. Jamaal Charles and Mark Ingram will get another workout as Lance Barrate tries to protect first-year starter David Carr. On the other side, Emmanuel Sanders will face a battle against Vontae Davis, but Doug Baldwin and tight end Travis Kelce are solid alternate targets and Eddie Lacy will wear down a good defence, let alone Virden's. **PICK: CARTHAGE**

CHARLESWOOD @ TWIN CITIES (line – TRIUMPH by 3)

INJURIES: Charleswood – None; Twin Cities – Bobby Wagner (OUT).

Neither of these teams struggled to subdue their overmatched opponents in Week One but the Triumph earned more style points by hanging 30 points on the Cannibals and making Marcus Mariota look like the rookie he is. Peyton Manning not finding the end zone until the 4th quarter against LA has toned down some of the rhetoric about a super offence in Charleswood and has nervous bettors rethinking their position on the team to beat in the East. Still, the Triumph stepping in as 3-point favourites is a surprise and an opportunity. The Pats have a good run defence and may have found a star in rookie defensive tackle Danny Shelton, who recorded 3 sacks in his first EFL game. The line's performance will be the key to shutting down the Triumph attack, which features a dynamic running back in Melvin Gordon who can defuse a pass rush and give time for Jay Cutler to find his terrific targets in the passing game. The key to the Pats' attack will be to maintain a balanced game plan against a team with a solid defence in all phases. Their slow start on offence notwithstanding, Charleswood is still the team to beat in my book. **PICK: CHARLESWOOD**

MISSION VIEJO @ MOHAVE (line – HELLFIRE by 6)

INJURIES: Mission Viejo – Lardarius Webb (OUT); Mohave – Allen Robinson (OUT).

Early season lines are notoriously erratic but this one appears particularly whimsical. The Monarchs scored an upset against the heavily-favoured Cubs in their season-opener while Andrew Luck had to pull one out of the bag in the final minute to push by stubborn, yet terrible, Virden. One thing we learned about the Monarchs last week is that their offensive line held its own against what most experts believe is the best defensive front in the league in Iowa City. The Hellfire D-line is improved, but clearly not in the same category, so Chris Ivory should find some room to run if Ryan Tannehill remembers to challenge Mohave's unimpressive corners. Andrew Luck posted an eye-popping number 441 yards passing last week but failed to find the end zone with a throw against a generally incapable defence. The running game was serviceable and could find some success this week against a Monarchs D that surrendered 163 ground yards to the Cubs. These teams are close, much closer than 6 points. **PICK: MISSION VIEJO**

BEAUFORT COUNTY @ IOWA CITY (line – Pick’Em)

INJURIES: Beaufort County – Jairus Byrd (OUT); Iowa City – None.

Scheme adjustments are needed for the Cubs’ defence. They might also consider dressing more of their starters. They badly lost the clock battle and surrendered over 400 yards of offence to the Monarchs last week in dropping their season opener. They open at home this week with better prospects of holding the Ravens’ offence in check but a tougher defence to crack in both phases. They will hope to improve on the 21-minute time of possession they had against Mission and let Russell Wilson take care of the rest. The Ravens went with journeyman Shaun Hill at QB against Chino last week and it worked out largely because of the running of Karlos Williams and a defence that shut down the Convicts in the first half. Hill was projected to be the back-up but Ravens Coach, Neil Shannon appears ready to spot start him for RGIII depending on the match-up. With the formidable talent on the Cubs’ defence this looks like a good spot for the mercurial RGII to make his 2015 debut. **PICK: IOWA CITY**

CHINO @ LOS ANGELES (line – CONVICTS by 2)

INJURIES: Chino – Ian Williams (OUT); Los Angeles – None.

It is only a matter of time before the Knights break their losing streak, which currently stands at 22 games going back to 2013. It could very well happen this week. It may be too early to declare the ‘Blue Shield’ back to anything resembling its championship form of 2011, but it’s not too early to bet on the 2015 edition handling a very sluggish-looking Chino offence. The Convicts finished with 363 net yards against the Ravens, but more than 100 of those came in the final 3 minutes of the game when they were playing catch-up. On the other side, Chino’s old (and I mean old) ‘Lockdown Crew’ is looking a little frail up front, offering an opportunity for Le’Veon Bell to carry the LA offence on his back and protect young Terry Bridgewater from a predatory Convicts’ secondary. Although some tangible signs point to a possible upset, we are still talking about the Knights – a team as unlucky as it is bad. One bad Bridgewater pick could be all it takes to upset the fragile psyche of their perpetually underwhelming offence. It might be close for a while, but trust in Cam. **PICK: CHINO**

MARKHAM @ DURHAM (line – NORTH STARS by 2)

INJURIES: Markham – None; Durham – None.

Markham’s battering of the Corn Kings last week coupled with Durham’s rather effeminate offensive performance against a straw man Pickering defence have panicked the odds-makers. Not since....actually not since never have the North Stars been favoured on the road against the Thunder Lizards – even in their glory years. The recent history of first-time match-ups between these teams also favours Markham, making it seem like a no-brainer to make Durham the underdog. Fair enough. Let the masses be fooled by the any-given-Sunday phenomenon while I focus on what happens on the other Sundays. While it might be worth re-evaluating Markham as a team that cannot be slept on, they are no playoff sleeper. Against the Durham secondary, Brandon Marshall will be hard-pressed to approach last week’s 8-catch performance, while the intrepid QB duo known as Eli Smith will be even more hard-pressed to get the ball to him. The Markham running backs do not look particularly threatening this year even if the offensive line looks robust. I just can’t see the Markham offence posting many quality points during the tough early and middle phases of a typical game free of whacky bounces. The Lizards offence, despite their lack of finish against the Spartans, can explode without warning. Well....here’s your warning. **PICK: DURHAM**

YORK @ PICKERING (line – EXCALIBURS by 3)

INJURIES: York – (None); Pickering – None.

It is hard to gauge exactly where the Yorkies are offensively after playing in the heavy rain last week, but it is safe to say that they are unlikely to post another 14 points in the 1st quarter. Those were the only points they scored against Scarborough, by the way, and 7 of those came on a punt return TD. The York attack had no staying and that was only partly due to the rain; having nowhere to go after the Blue Eagles decided to double Kelvin Benjamin was the other part. Fortunately, the Spartans defence that gave up 22 points to Durham last week has probably already played their best game of the year. If the Swords cannot make something happen through the air against the Pickering secondary it is going to be a very long year for Tom Brady. On the other side, Philip Rivers has nice targets in the passing game and a former All Pro runner in the back field. But he also has himself, and when he is off, as he was last week, he can single-handedly lose a game. The Spartans are theoretically capable of out-pacing the ponderous Excaliburs, but I expect Von Miller and Junior Galette to keep that just a theory. **PICK: YORK**

SEBASTIAN @ COWTOWN (line – SWORDFISH by 4)

INJURIES: Sebastian – None; Cowtown – None.

It is rare to see the Fish favoured at all, let alone on the road, but the Corn Kings were so bad in their opening game that the panic-stricken Vegas odds-makers temporarily shut down betting to re-adjust the line. Coincidentally, the Fish pushed Gwinnett into overtime and probably would have won if they had taken the points when they had the chance at the end of their first possession of the extra frame. With the world temporarily turning on its axis in the opposite direction it is easy to mistake east for west. But, true to this week's form, I am remaining strong in my orthodoxy. Cowtown has an elite pass rush that failed to register a single sack last week. That result is a tribute to Markham's offensive line as much as it is an indictment of Cowtown's performance. While CJ Anderson could break a few runs against the Cowtown blitz, Andy Dalton will not have much time in the pocket to find Odell Beckham. On the other side, Joe Flacco will pick apart the brittle Sebastian secondary if the threat of Todd Gurley can buy him the time to do so. It won't be an easy win, but it will be an easy cover. **PICK: COWTOWN**

AURORA @ GWINNETT (line – MUSTANGS by 5)

INJURIES: Gwinnett – None; Aurora – None.

The Mustangs rode over the Regulators last week, striking fear into other aspirants for the South Division title. The Glads were on the B-list of potential playoff teams before their defence received a wake-up call at the Fish Tank in Sebastian. Now, they look like a borderline 500 team. I can see a bounce back for their home opener at the Coliseum, but will the bounce be high enough to ride the Mustangs out of Gwinnett County? It could be if Big Ben can take over the game for a second week in a row and hit the strike zone again to Jeremy Maclin. LeSean McCoy hitting the 100-yard mark would help, too. For the Mustangs, they must avoid complacency – which will be hard for a team riding a 20-game winning streak to do. They continue to hold a big edge over the Gladiators, but it is not as big as it was last year. **PICK: AURORA**

SOUTH CAROLINA @ SCARBOROUGH (line – BLUE EAGLES by 8)

INJURIES: South Carolina – Dontay Moch (OUT), Sam Shields (OUT); Scarborough– Jermaine Gresham (DOUBTFUL), Will Hill (OUT), TJ Yeldon (OUT).

With this line we have definitely hit the bottom of the Vegas rabbit hole. We end our segment with the most astounding of all over-reactions to the Week One Madness. Upon reflection, though, there was nothing crazy about the Blue Eagles beating York on a last minute field goal, or unusual about the Regulators getting beaten up by Aurora. But this line simply disregards the fact that TJ Yeldon is injured and Alfred Blue will start at running back for Scarborough. Who is Blue, you say? Good question – one you will still be asking after this game is over. It also ignores the disparity between the South Carolina receivers and the Scarborough corners – a sure mismatch in favour of the visitors. Sure, the injury to Sam Shields will open up space for DeSean Jackson, but Aaron Rodgers will need all of it to compensate for having no running game. **PICK: SOUTH CAROLINA**



ANCIENT HISTORY
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This Week in EFL History
With Professor Sterling Smitherman

FROM THE EFL ARCHIVES – The beginning of the 2009 season was marked by a virtually universal acclamation of the Florida Dragons as the Champions-To-Be. It was not because there was no competition. Durham had a historically great offensive line, very good running backs and weapons at receiver. But they also had Turnover King, **Philip Rivers** at QB. Chino had a defence every bit as frightening as the Dragons back-eleven, but “championship quarterback **Jay Cutler**” just didn't have a convincing ring to it. The Patriots were loaded with talent, as usual, and with

Peyton Manning at QB they were the consensus favourite to challenge the Mighty Dragons for the big prize. But the Dragons were not only strong, they had playmakers – game changers – on both sides of the ball, an up-and-coming young quarterback named **Aaron Rodgers**, who could make all the throws, and the best running back combo in the league. Plus, the Dragons had been there already. They knew how to win.

2009 was also the year the Anchorage Buccaneers vanished and the Virden Violators, with their psychotic logo and Goth fan base, appeared. They were not any better for the change of scenery, but, heck, the change of scenery was welcome anyway.

Week One went according to the prognosticators' predictions except for the game that brought fans the 'Play of the Week.' With underdog Markham trailing Cowtown 17-13 and 0:23 remaining in the game, **Donovan McNabb** launched a long ball to little-used wide-out, **Devery Henderson**. Henderson, a former Corn King, had a step behind the defender and burned his old team for a 67-yard game-winning TD catch. It was an amazing play and one that is still shown on Markham highlight reels today.