



# PREVIEW

2007 SEASON

## PEYTON PATRIOTIC IN CHARLESWOOD

The EFL's top draft choice is ready to be "The Man" among men in struggle for QB supremacy

Peyton Manning looked relaxed and confident after the game. His Patriots had just put up 24 unanswered points after falling behind 10-0 to Gwinnett in his team's final exhibition game. He had played only one series, gaining a first down before being forced to punt, but he carried the look of a cavalry Colonel who had just led the big charge to take the hill. While back-up Brian Griese, who had actually played most of the game, changed quietly in the corner of the locker room, Peyton spoke animatedly with a throng of reporters. He looked as if he was trying to suppress a child-like giddiness as he talked about his team.

When Peyton played for the Indianapolis Colts of the now defunct NFL, he often had to play alongside perennially weak defenses. Not so in Charleswood. In fact, the Patriot's defense might be better than the offense. Don't believe it? Take a look at our team preview later in this issue and then form your opinion. As for Peyton, he sounded like a man convinced that something special was coming together for him and Coach, Jason Findlay.

"It takes a lot of pressure off of us to know our defense is going to get it done day in, day out. That gives us confidence for sure," Manning said. "And when something does happen, if the other team does get into the end zone, we'll be there to pick them up."

Manning may be already the league's most valuable player. Everyone around him appears ready to work a little harder, knowing that he is leading them. Even the boisterously obnoxious Chad Johnson seems to have toned down his personality somewhat in the pre-season.

"Camp is about getting ready for work," Johnson said last week. "It's business, man, business. But don't worry, you'll know when I'm working."

As tempting as it may be for a rash prognosticator to crown the Patriots champions before a regular season snap has been



Peyton Manning acknowledges fans at Patriot Place in Winnipeg during final pre-season game against Gwinnett. Will he be the league's first MVP?

### IN THIS ISSUE

#### **The Smucker Scoop**

**Page 2**

**"It is Written" – the Football Oracle reads your team's future**

**Page 3**

**WEEK ONE  
The match-ups**

**Page 8**

taken, a prudent and wise one knows enough to temper the excitement. All that is needed is a quick glance at the rest of the EFL field to know that a little luck could change the entire picture. Manning may be facing his stiffest competition of his career.

The underrated Marc Bulger quietly heads up the league's "hottest" team, the Mohave Hellfire. With Terrell Owens and Brian Westbrook helping him, Bulger certainly will challenge his more accomplished counterpart in Charleswood for Top Gun in the EFL's East Division. In Gwinnett, Gladiator, Carson Palmer will get his opportunities to strike some critical blows to his opponents with "fast" Willie Parker always a threat to break the big run. And don't forget Florida's Tom Brady! Although many teams passed on him in the draft, he still has the coolest hand under pressure in the entire league.

Out in the Wild West, gunslingers Drew Brees of Anchorage and Philip Rivers of Durham will shoot it out for the sheriff's badge while trying to lead their respective teams to the top. Rivers has poise and confidence, but may end up needing a little help from his teammates to surpass Brees.

Surprisingly, it may ultimately be a running back, not a quarterback, who makes the biggest difference to his team's success or demise. Durham's Frank Gore and Chino's LaDainian Tomlinson both tore it up in training camp and look ready to explode. If either one of them does, the hype surrounding Peyton Manning and his quarterback rivals may be the big forgotten story of the season.



## The Smucker Scoop

### The Last Cut is the deepest – a look at the players who did not make the final cut

By Orville Smucker

**COWTOWN** – They say that the toughest job for any coach is deciding who makes the team. Sometimes it comes down to only two players – both valuable, both talented, both deserving, but only one can stay and the other must go. Those who have had to do it say that it can be the toughest call they make all season.

Some hearts were broken last week, and here is the inside "scoop" on why some players "on the bubble" were finally "burst":

**Anchorage** – Reliable and tough, the veteran Ladell Betts looked like the perfect compliment to rookie halfback Joseph Addai in the Buccaneer's two-pronged running attack. But in the end, the promise of college standout, Willis McGahee was too much for Coach Fenton to pass on. Bypassed in the waiver draft, Betts finally signed with the Driftwood Bullies of the SFL.

**Charleswood** – Young and loaded with talent, wide receiver Reggie Williams could not beat out solid possession receiver and return man, Wes Welker on a team stocked with a bit of everything. The surprising thing was not that the Patriots couldn't afford to carry his salary, but that no other EFL team picked him up. And so Reggie finds himself as the number one receiver on the Torrance Tigers of the SFL.

**Chino** – It's tough when one of the best offensive linemen in professional football fails to make a team with Bryant McKinnie as its starting right tackle. But Orlando Pace is 31 and injury prone so his salary was a burden. As one of the best offensive linemen in professional football, a salary cut was out of the question, and that's why Pace now starts for the SFL's Mississippi Rebels.

**Cowtown** – The quarterback battle in Cowtown ended with young Alex Smith being passed over for veteran, Chad Pennington. Smith's first round pedigree carried a heavy price tag, too heavy for a back-up, and Smith was jettisoned. He turned down an offer from the SFL's Doe County Sheriffs to sign with the Vancouver Panthers of the CFL.

**Durham** – One of Durham's injury-prone star safeties had to go. Bob Sanders is in and Mike Brown is out. In a rebuilding year, it might have been different, but the Thunder Lizards have a shot at the Division and could not afford to drop solid but ageing, Cornelius Griffin.

**Florida** – On a team looking for play-makers in the secondary, it was a surprise when Kevin Kaesviharn failed to make the cut with the Dragons. But the move makes much more sense when

you realize that coach, Jim Heaton intends to ride Tom Brady, Steven Jackson and T.J. Houshmandzadeh into the ground this year and bank on better prospects next year.

**Gwinnett** – The Gladiators did not cut any impact players but they did lose some useful spare parts. Shawntae Spencer and Hank Baskett both attracted some interest from teams looking for good back-ups or role players, but not enough to keep both of them from signing with the San Antonio Armadillos of the Tex-Mex football League.

**Iowa City** – In a cunning move not foreseen by many Cubs observers, Deron Redding cut loose unproven Ko Simpson in anticipation of better prospects in the Waiver Draft. The gamble paid off when safety O.J. Atogwe, a vicious tackler, found himself fourth on the stacked Mohave depth chart and was let go. Ko, a sentimental favourite of coach Deron Redding, now mans centerfield for the Phoenix Roadrunners of the SFL.

**Kutztown** – Opting for depth at wide receiver over tight end, the Golden Bears held on to veteran slot receiver, Brandon Stokley and let Courtney Anderson go. Not a proficient blocker but a decent receiver, Anderson was not quite as decent as Dallas Clark and Ben Utecht, and was expendable in terms of pure talent. But the move leaves only two regular tight ends on the roster. Reserve guard Daryn Colledge is reportedly running pass patterns with the practice squad.

**Los Angeles** – The Knights were shopping Alex Barron up to the last day before the end of training camp. The Corn Kings reportedly showed some interest but not enough to sign the solid young tackle. Hot college prospect, Kenny Irons, was also let go but was snatched up by Florida.

**Meadowlands** – Talented but expensive running back, Wali Lundy found himself behind too much proven talent on a team with 3 other potential starters at the position. Wali is gone and playing for the Big Pond Pandas of the SFL. Wide Receiver Steve Smith was also cut, causing quite a stir initially until the locals realized that he was “the other Steve Smith.”

**Mohave** – Everyone was waiting to see which high-priced star would be sent out into the desert from a team stacked with high-priced stars. Instead, a trio of good players, not stars, got pink slips. The best of those, O.J. Atogwe, was immediately picked up by Iowa City. Vernand Morency, courted by Cowtown, finally found his way to the Toronto Boatmen of the CFL, while receiver, Matt Jones was snatched up by the Big Pond Pandas of the SFL.



# It is written

The Football Oracle

**The fate of your team is written. Look, if you dare, at the future. . . .**

## EAST DIVISION

**Two great armies shall meet in the east, one from the fiery southern depths and one from the northern plains. They will each, in their separate paths, vanquish all before them until they face each other alone upon the field of busted balls. The battle will be fierce and many will fall. Heroes will die and live forever in the legends of the bards and others will taste the wine of victory and write their own epithets. The King of the Northern Tundra, Findlay, shall extinguish the Elder Fire of the Southern Wastes and turn his blood thirsty sword to the West.**



## CHARLESWOOD PATRIOTS

**Predicted Finish: 13-3**

**OFFENSE:** Peyton Manning. His supporting cast includes dynamic wide receiver, Chad Johnson and excellent but underrated tight end, Jason Witten. Tarik Glenn and Chris Samuels protect the edges in front of “good enough for Prime Time” running back, Thomas Jones. The middle of the line is unspectacular, but Peyton makes it a moot point. **Rating: A**

**DEFENSE:** The Patriots run a 3-4 set that includes a promising but green young rookie linebacker named David Harris. If the defense has a weakness, Harris is it. The rest of the group reads like a Pro Bowl squad with Adelius Thomas, Richard Seymour, and Ed Reed leading the way. Cornerback, Assante Samuel is a ball-hawk extraordinaire. This is a scary group that could score points as often as they surrender them. **Rating: A+**

**SPECIAL TEAMS:** A mediocre kicking and return game hurts less because of strength in other areas. Kick coverage may be a weak point this season as the Patriots struggled during pre-season in stopping opponent’s returns. **Rating: C**



## MOHAVE HELLFIRE

**Predicted Finish: 12-4**

**OFFENSE:** Center, Olin Kreutz and left tackle, Willie Anderson lead the most dominating front five in the league. With stars, Brian Westbrook, Shawn Alexander, and rookie, Marshawn Lynch running behind that ‘Wall of Meat’ the Hellfire will be able to control and run the ball almost at will. Bring extra men in the box to stop the run and get burned by Terrell Owens or Laveranues Coles. Depth could be a concern, as third wide-out Matt Jones got his walking papers at the end of camp and the team is carrying only two tight ends. **Rating: A**

**DEFENSE:** It’s no exaggeration to say teams will be playing with fire if they try to be too aggressive against this unit. Any secondary with Champ Bailey on it is one to be reckoned with, but add All Pro safety, Brian Dawkins and veteran All Harris to it and throwing downfield starts to look like a suicide mission. Turn conservative and get smothered by Jamal Williams and Brian Urlacher. To call the lack of a dominating defensive end a weakness is relative only to their main rival, Charleswood. **Rating: A**

**SPECIAL TEAMS:** Veteran kicker John Carney will give Hellfire fans some comfort when the game is on the line. Punter, Sam Koch is unproven but should not get much work this season. Kick coverage is a weakness, with only one gunner on the roster. **Rating: B**



## GWINNETT GLADIATORS

**Predicted Finish: 9-7**

**OFFENSE:** A potential top tier offense with Carson Palmer, Willie Parker, Reggie Wayne and Tony Gonzalez at the skill positions. An offensive line that stands out in run blocking but loses an edge in pass protection could be a slight drag on the offence against the league’s top defenses.

**Rating: A-**

**DEFENSE:** Lance Briggs and Troy Polamalu are playmakers and Coach Birdsall will be relying on them to come up big in the crunch. The rest of the unit is good, but unspectacular, and with Will Smith providing almost the entire pass rush by himself, the Gladiators will have to blitz to generate pressure. **Rating: B**

**SPECIAL TEAMS:** Kicker, Robbie Gould is reliable and punter Dave Zastudil has the accuracy of a sniper. Terrence McGee and Nate Burleson form a dangerous return tandem. **Rating: A-**



## FLORIDA DRAGONS

**Predicted Finish: 7-9**

**OFFENSE:** The Dragons have all of the key players at the skill positions, including a future hall-of-fame candidate in Tom Brady, and they have a strong offensive line anchored by Jammal Brown. Steven Jackson could have an MVP year if all goes well. So why are they likely to finish behind the Gwinnett Gladiators in the East Division? Read on. **Rating: A-**

**DEFENSE:** This unit can handle the run with the best of them due to a strong four man front. The linebackers are not stars yet but they are solid. Where the Dragons blow smoke, not fire, is in the secondary, where Charles Tillman leads a mediocre Air Defense Corps that includes a green rookie starting safety. Against the top teams this could make the difference, and not in Florida's favour.

**Rating: B-**

**SPECIAL TEAMS:** The kicking game is strong, but the return men are decidedly lackluster. Gunner, Richard Marshall is a snark plug who could steal a ball or two. **Rating: B+**



## KUTZTOWN GOLDEN BEARS

**Predicted Finish: 6-10**

**OFFENSE:** Larry Johnson will see a lot of action and that will be a good thing and a bad thing – good because he is a stud who can handle the load and bad because he will attract a lot of attention because of it. Can Alan Faneca break open enough holes on his own to pave the way? Tony Romo has a great future, but for the present he brings inexperience with his talent. Marvin Harrison will attract a lot of double teams. **Rating: B-**

**DEFENSE:** Jason Taylor, Jason Taylor, Jason Taylor. Did I mention Jason Taylor? If Johnson is the one-man offense, Taylor is the one-man defense. The Golden Bears will be relying on him to turn the game around in critical situations. With the help of a ball-hawking secondary, Taylor and Co. will get a lot of takeaways, but they will also give up a lot of yards. **Rating: B**

**SPECIAL TEAMS:** With two place kickers on its roster and an All Pro punter in Brian Moorman, the kicking game is in excellent shape. Allen Rossum is a solid return specialist and the kick coverage is efficient. **Rating: A-**



## MEADOWLANDS SWAMP DOGS

**Predicted Finish: 5-11**

**OFFENSE:** There is a lot of talent on the roster but it is *young* talent and not ready for Prime Time just yet. Coming off a tumultuous off-season, Ben Roethlisberger will need protection from his line, which he is unlikely to get since guard Stephen Neal is the most accomplished lineman on the roster. A trio of good running backs will have to count on Mack Strong to lead the way to daylight. Javon Walker will get open, but will Big Ben be able to see him from under the pile? **Rating: C+**

**DEFENSE:** The Swamp Dogs have a feisty defense starting with a pair of top flight corners in Nathan Vasher and Ronde Barber, and play-making safety, Kerry Rhodes. But the monster of the squad is linebacker DeMarcus Ware, a one-man wrecking crew who does it all. To top it off, a pair of QB-seeking ends, Bobby McCray and Kyle Vanden Bosch, complete a dangerous pass rush that should put many pivots on their backsides. **Rating: B+**

**SPECIAL TEAMS:** The Swamp Dogs will make the highlight reel a lot this season with Maurice Jones-Drew, Antwaan Randle-El, Justin Miller, and Santonio Holmes all vying for kick return time. Lawrence Tynes is somewhat erratic, while punter, Dustin Colquitt is an up-and-comer. **Rating: A**



## WEST DIVISION

**The Lizard King will gore his captured enemies and fill the rivers with their corpses. Pirates from the north will ride the icy breeze into the Lizard's nesting grounds, smashing their eggs. Emboldened, the condemned shall loose their bonds and, un-nabbed, make a pact with man to slay the scaly beast. The King of the Corn shall raise an army of children to force penance upon the damned while the Knights of the Realm make their last stand in the Citadel of Carrtoum. The young shall perish as the Lost Man seeks forgiveness from the Law. The world shall be consumed and no man shall face the doom that comes from the East.**



### DURHAM THUNDER LIZARDS

**Predicted Finish: 11-5**

**OFFENSE:** It is entirely possible that Frank Gore will rush for 100+ yards in 14 out of 16 games this season. With a little luck, he might do it every week. Gore is explosive and his blockers are proficient. Young quarterback, Philip Rivers is mature beyond his years and he has the best tight end in the game to turn to in a pinch. Before the rookie draft, pundits pointed to the wide receivers as a minor weakness, but Durham put that to rest by drafting Calvin Johnson. **Rating: A**

**DEFENSE:** The Thunder Lizards have a good run defense and can generate pressure on the quarterback. The no-name crew manning the defensive line and linebacking corps are led by underrated end, Ty Warren. But the heart and soul of the defense is hatchet man safety, Adrian Wilson, a virtual linebacker with a corner's cover skills. On the downside, behind Chris McAlister the cover men are average. Overall, the 'D' is not Patriots grade, but it is good enough. **Rating: B**

**SPECIAL TEAMS:** Punter, Kyle Larson will not have much work but when called upon will perform at a Pro Bowl level. Young place-kicker, Josh Scobee is decent and capable of coming through in the clutch. The return men are competent. **Rating: B+**



### ANCHORAGE BUCCANEERS

**Predicted Finish: 10-6**

**OFFENSE:** This is a team that could win the Division title or fall by the wayside. If they win the Division it will be because of the offense, led by Drew Brees. With Andre Johnson and Marques Colston on the flanks and Alge Crumpler as the safety valve, opponents will not be able to cheat against the run. The team blocking, which includes specialists Lorenzo Neal and Jason Dunn, is geared to boost the run and that is good news for Joseph Addai. The Bucs should score a lot of points. **Rating: A**

**DEFENSE:** If Anchorage falls by the wayside it will be because of the defense – in particular, the secondary. Below average by EFL standards, the most dynamic playmaker in the Bucs' outfield is nickel corner, Ricky Manning Jr. The situation improves at the second level with Al Wilson and Keith Bullock leading a solid team of linebackers. On the line however, take Leonard Little out of the mix and the pass rush almost disappears. Overall this group is a little shaky for a top four team, but it is possibly just good enough to keep the offense afloat. **Rating: C+**

**SPECIAL TEAMS:** Any team with Devin Hester returning kicks has the "secret weapon" advantage over its rivals. Believe it or not, Hester and back-up Joshua Cribbs could tilt the balance of power in the west in favour of the Bucs. The kicking game is great too, incidentally. **Rating: A+**



## COWTOWN CORN KINGS

**Predicted Finish: 9-7**

**OFFENSE:** The strength of the Corn Kings' offense is in the trenches where they have arguably the best overall blocking corps in the league. Excellent in both run-blocking and pass protection, the line will certainly raise the play of the skill players they protect – but how high? The running backs, the wide receivers, and the tight ends are all virtual unknowns. Quarterback, Chad Pennington, is the ultimate game manager, but can he challenge the best defenses when the chips are down? This offense will need a good game plan to succeed consistently. **Rating: B**

**DEFENSE:** The strength of the defense lies in the front four, where twin threats, Aaron Schobel and Aaron Kampman attack from the edges while Tommie Harris and Kelly Gregg clog the middle. The linebackers are not spectacular but are free to roam due to the strength of the line in front of them. Behind them, Rashean Mathis shuts down one side of the field while Al Harris and Sean Jones follow the quarterback's eyes looking for turnovers. **Rating: A-**

**SPECIAL TEAMS:** Mike Scifres could get a lot of action this year if the offense sputters, but he is up to the challenge. Jason Hanson can strike from a distance. Mewelde Moore and Laurence Maroney form a respectable return tandem. **Rating: B+**



## CHINO CONVICTS

**Predicted Finish: 8-8**

**OFFENSE:** The Convicts will rely on LaDanian Tomlinson and a healthy Donovan McNabb to lead their attack. If either fails to perform as expected, Torry Holt and Anquan Boldin, as good as they are, will be able to carry them only so far. The offensive line will struggle to overcome a keying defense or an aggressive pass rush, so Coach Nazar will have to keep his opponents off balance with a good mix of calls. LT could be the league MVP for a Cinderella Squad, or he could end up a noble warrior fighting for a lost cause. **Rating: B+**

**DEFENSE:** With all of the pre-season hype around Charleswood and Mohave, it may come as a surprise that Chino surrendered the fewest rushing yards in exhibition play. A closer look reveals that it was no accident – Pat Williams, Julius Peppers, and Zack Thomas are all Pro Bowl caliber tacklers and Ernie Sims is surprisingly stout against the run. But with twin hammerhead safeties, Sean Taylor and Roy Williams biting on every play action fake, the Convicts will be vulnerable deep down the middle of the field. **Rating: B+**

**SPECIAL TEAMS:** Bad Boy, Pacman Jones will provide a spark in the return game, but his durability is a concern. Adam Vinatieri is proven in the clutch and could win a game or two. Nick Harris is....well, Nick Harris. The Convicts were the only team to drop their professional long snapper. Will it come back to haunt them? **Rating: B**



## LOS ANGELES KNIGHTS

**Predicted Finish: 7-9**

**OFFENSE:** Offense? What offense? The Knights' offensive woes start with the quarterback and end with the quarterback. In between there are few bright spots, but those do include the grittiest playmaker in the game, Steve Smith, and the best tight end not named Antonio Gates, Todd Heap. David Carr throws a nice ball but he needs protection – something he is not going to get from a group of offensive linemen who block well on the ground but cannot stand their ground against the pass rush. **Rating: C**

**DEFENSE:** As shaky as the offense is, the Knights' defense is steady as a rock. In fact, it is one of the best in the league. The question is whether or not it can win games at a faster rate than the offense can lose them. A deadly pass rush combined with two of the best ball-hawking corners in the league, Nnamdi Asomugha and Charles Woodson, could lead to big turnabouts at critical points in the game. Everybody on the squad meets at the quarterback, even All Pro run-stuffer, Kevin Williams. Defensive leader, Shawne Merriman can do it all, and he will have to if the Knights are going to compete for the title. **Rating: A**

**SPECIAL TEAMS:** The other Carr, Chris, carries the load in the kick return game while rookie, Ted Ginn returns punts. Both are respectable and Ginn is potentially explosive. Rian Lindell can make the big kick but punter, Ryan Kluwe is a virtual unknown who will be well known by the end of the year. Kick coverage has been a concern and the team rotates place-kick holders. **Rating: C+**



## IOWA CITY CUBS

**Predicted Finish: 3-13**

**OFFENSE:** Coach Redding's Youth Movement will require a large down payment in patience this season while their future offensive stars learn the pro game. The young bloods will look to veterans....veteran....<hold on, one sec>....Birk, yes Matt Birk to lead them. Or maybe not. Maybe they will just flail around like hand puppets for the first year and turn their fans into tailgating alcoholics. **Rating: C**

**DEFENSE:** Unlike LA, the Cubs have no strong defense to redeem a suspect offense. A marginal edge in defending the run is negated by a feeble pass rush and a talented but apprenticing secondary that is, like the offense, still learning the pro game. The Cubs will give up many yards and points, and will not take the ball away enough to make a positive difference. In two years this will be a top notch squad, but not this year. **Rating: C**

**SPECIAL TEAMS:** Teams with nothing else usually can be relied upon to throw their collective energy into special teams. Not so Iowa City. While Dante Hall and Roscoe Parrish always remain a threat to stab the enemy in the gut with a big return, their opponents will be a bigger threat due to a lack of Cubs gunners. The kicking game features playboy, and place-kicker, Neil Rackers, and baby-faced punter, Ryan Plackemeier. The upside – the Cubs were voted 'Number One Hotties' by the EFL Cheerleaders Association. **Rating: B-**

## BUG THE BOOKIE!

**JIMMY ANSWERS YOUR FANTASY QUESTIONS**

**YOUR SOURCE FOR FANTASY AND ON-LINE BETTING SOLUTIONS**



**Q- I can't decide whether to start Wes Walker or Darrell Jackson as my 3<sup>rd</sup> wide receiver in Week One of the EFL. Who should I go with?**

**-Chad, Portland, OR**

**Jimmy** – It depends on your points system. For pure catches, go with Walker. Manning likes to throw to his slot receivers and Welker can hang onto the ball. Jackson will drop more than he catches. If you're only tracking TDs and yards, go with Jackson. When he does catch the ball it usually counts big.



**Q- I'm a Florida fan, but I'm thinking about sitting TJ Houshmandzadeh and playing Marques Colston instead. Who is the better bet this week?**

**-Arnie, Palm Beach**

**Jimmy** – Both are good picks, Arnie, but TJ is going up against the league's best shut down corner, Champ Bailey. With Andre Johnson facing Rashean Mathis, Colston will be the go-to guy for the Bucs against Cowtown. Normally I take the proven star, but this time the most proven star is the guy covering TJ, not TJ. Take Colston and run.

## **JIMMY'S WEEK ONE PICKS**

### **CHARLESWOOD @ GWINNETT (LINE – PATRIOTS BY 2)**

Hey, normally I like Carson Palmer and the Gladiators, especially at home in the Coliseum. But not this time! The Patriots are for real and Peyton Manning has all the help he needs on offense and defense. Palmer will be running for his life trying to come from behind. **PICK: CHARLESWOOD**

### **FLORIDA @ MOHAVE (LINE – HELLFIRE BY 5)**

Opening Day at the Fiery Depths is not a place I would want to start my season...even if I was Tom Brady. This place is too hot, even for the Dragons. The Hellfire will shut down Steven Jackson and take out TJ. There is hope for Florida if Mohave goes too conservative, but don't bet on it...bet on the Hellfire. **PICK: MOHAVE**

### **KUTZTOWN @ MEADOWLANDS (LINE – SWAMP DOGS BY 1)**

Mark this down, because it will be a long time before I pick the Swampies against a better team again, but something tells me that Tony Romo will have his hands full trying to read the blitz and find the open man against Meadowlands on opening day in their home park. For a day, at least, Meadowlands will share first place in the East. **PICK: MEADOWLANDS**

### **ANCHORAGE @ COWTOWN (LINE – CORN KINGS BY 3)**

In a dome under perfect conditions, maybe...maybe, I say, the Bucs' offense gets the better of the Corn Cobs...but not in Tillman Field on opening day. The Corn Kings should make short work of the Bucs' running game without trying too hard and the Bucs will have trouble stopping the run. It will be close, but I've got to be a homer here! **PICK: COWTOWN**

### **CHINO @ LOS ANGELES (LINE – CONVICTS BY 1)**

Both teams will try to execute a conservative game plan and "manage" the game on offense in the hope that they get a break. The difference will be that Chino will score points and Los Angeles will not. **PICK: CHINO**

### **DURHAM @ IOWA CITY (LINE – THUNDER LIZARDS BY 4)**

The only hope for the Cubs is that J.P. Losman can find his big receivers open downfield against a marginally vulnerable secondary before the Thunder Lizards pass rush finds him. Ronnie Brown might as well take the day off. Homefield advantage will keep the game close for a while, but Durham will take control in the fourth quarter and win by 10 points. **PICK: DURHAM**