

2020

Wildcard



EFL

ELITE FOOTBALL LEAGUE



Blazing Through a Pandemic in our 14th Season!



February 7, 2021

EAST

NORTH



	CHINO	13
	BRUXELLES	24

	COWTOWN	19
	BROOKLIN	20



CENTRAL

COASTAL



WEST

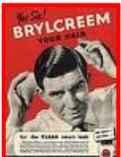
SOUTH



CRAZY

COMEBACK!

Brooklin QB, *Derek Carr*, rallies his team to the huddle as time ticks away in 4th quarter action in Brooklin. Carr engineered two TD drives in the 4th quarter, bringing his team back from a 19-6 deficit to defeat the Corn Kings, 20-19. His comeback in the final period erased three quarters of frustration over which he threw 3 interceptions. Those turnovers allowed the Corn Kings to build up what appeared to be a comfortable lead before Carr's heroics turned the tables at the end. The Hawks were inspired by a special coterie of fans. (See *Spats McChad* inside)



Who was slick
in Wildcard
Weekend?

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



Derek Carr
QB
Brooklin
Hawks

34 of 45, 400 yards, 3 TDs, 3 INTs.
Came thru in 4th to pull off a victory.



Frank Clark
DE
Bruxelles
Bombers

3 T, 1 STF, 7 QB Pressures. No sacks,
but set the tone for pressure on the QB.



13

Chino



24

Bruxelles

TEAM LEADERS

Passing	Cmp	Att	Yds	TD
Prescott	20	40	273	2
Rushing	Car	Yds	Avg	TD
McCaffrey	18	69	3.8	1
Receiving	Rec	Yds	Avg	TD
Jones II	6	54	9.0	0

Team	1	2	3	4	OT	Total
Chino	7	3	0	3	-	13
Bruxelles	10	7	7	0	-	24

TEAM LEADERS

Passing	Cmp	Att	Yds	TD
Goff	18	39	214	1
Rushing	Car	Yds	Avg	TD
Fournette	17	107	6.3	1
Receiving	Rec	Yds	Avg	TD
Kelce	6	72	12.0	0

Play of the Game
 In the 1st quarter, 5:53 on the clock, **Leonard Fournette** swept left behind **Joel Bitonio** and **Justin Pugh** and broke free for a 65-yard run, setting up the Bombers' first TD and sparking the team.

FOURNETTE FORGES PATH TO VICTORY!

BRUXELLES RUNNING BACK AND DEFENCE COMBINE TO JAIL CONVICTS!

SUMMARY: The player who had done it all for the Bombers during the regular season continued to carry his team in the wildcard round of the playoffs. **Leonard Fournette** rushed for 107 yards and a touchdown on 17 carries and caught 4 passes for 27 yards to lead the Bruxelles offence, while **Luke Kuechly's** 12 tackles and **Frank Clark's** remarkable 7 QB-pressures led a defensive effort that held the Chino offence to a single field goal in the second half. Contained within a crumbling pocket throughout most of the last three quarters, Chino quarterback **Dak Prescott** completed just 20 of 40 passes on the day, and threw two interceptions and no touchdown passes. His 273 yards passing was largely wasted by the inability to finish off drives and the Bombers' stout posture on third and fourth downs. **Christian McCaffrey** finished with 141 total yards and rushed for a touchdown but struggled to make an impact in the second half as the Bomber defence watched him like a hawk. The game started off competitively in the first half. The Convicts found the end zone first on a 1-yard dive by McCaffrey that capped a 13-play, 93-yard drive. But the Bombers answered straight away, with Fournette breaking a 65-yard run to the Chino 2-yard line then running it into the end zone on the next play to give Bruxelles a 10-7 lead. The Convicts tied it on a field goal set up by a 28-yard screen to McCaffrey, but the Bombers went in front by a touchdown when **Kerryon Johnson** hit pay dirt from 6 yards out on the last of six consecutive running plays out to round off a 67-yard drive. **Foster Moreau** picked off Prescott in Chino territory on Chino's next possession, but the Bombers were unable to capitalize when **Matt Prater** missed a 32-yard field goal try, leaving the score at 17-10 heading into halftime. The Convict offence struggled to move the chains in the third quarter, while **Jared Goff** made his presence felt on Bruxelles' second possession of the half, completing 4 of 4 for 75 yards, including a 26-yard scoring strike to **Chris Godwin** to vault the Bombers further in front, 24-10. A 54-yard completion to **Michael Gallup** got Chino deep into Bruxelles territory, but the offence stalled and they ended up settling for a 28-yard field goal. From then the Bombers' defence dominated while the offence burned time off the clock to finish off a complete win.

QUOTES: "Team effort all around today! Leonard stood out, but a lot of support for that. Justin and Bits got out quickly on the sweep to lay down that first block on the big run. Our defence rose to the occasion. If they keep playing like this and I like our chances." – Bruxelles coach, **Ken Main**.
 "The Bombers shut us down in the second half. We could not find our way on third and fourth down. They out-executed us there. I thought our defence played well overall, they kept us in the game. Dak was under a lot of pressure. Congratulations to the Bombers!" – Chino coach, **Rob Nazar**.

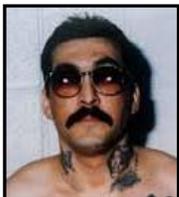


ANGRY FAN



titter

HAPPY FAN



Quentin San Pedro @QSP
 ¡No otra vez! Another exit with the offence a no-show. Dak wants a long-term deal. He needs to produce in the clutch.



Faart van Wijnendaele FVW@BrusselsTimes
 #Bombers win in spite of @JaredGoff16 struggles to hit his targets. Team came together. This is a complete win.



Chino 13 Bruxelles 24

Chino	1	2	3	4	F
Bruxelles	7	3	0	3	13
	10	7	7	0	24



* Playoff * 02-08-2021 The Fortress Temp:77 Wind: No Line MVP:Fournette HF

1	12:03	Bruxelles	FG	Prater 46 (10-47-2:52)	0-3
1	6:06	Chino	TD	McCaffrey 1 run (McLaughlin) (13-93-5:45)	7-3
1	4:51	Bruxelles	TD	Fournette 2 run (Prater) (3-69-1:07)	7-10
2	14:47	Chino	FG	McLaughlin 31 (9-62-5:00)	10-10
2	4:36	Bruxelles	TD	Johnson 6 run (Prater) (13-67-5:12)	10-17
3	6:48	Bruxelles	TD	Goff 26 pass to Godwin (Prater) (6-75-2:35)	10-24
4	10:45	Chino	FG	McLaughlin 28 (5-50-2:15)	13-24

Passing	Att	Cmp	Yds	25	In	Td	Sk	Rate
Prescott	40	20	273	2	2	0	3	51.4
	40	20	273	2	2	0	3	51.4

Passing	Att	Cmp	Yds	25	In	Td	Sk	Rate
Goff	39	18	214	1	0	1	0	72.0
	39	18	214	1	0	1	0	72.0

Rushing	Att	Yds	Avg	FD	10	Lg	Td
McCaffrey	18	69	3.8	4	1	15	1
Ingram II	7	31	4.4	2	1	10	0
Prescott	3	18	6.0	2	1	11	0
Jones II	1	5	5.0	0	0	5	0
	29	123	4.2	8	3	15	1

Rushing	Att	Yds	Avg	FD	10	Lg	Td
Fournette	17	107	6.3	4	2	65	1
Johnson	6	27	4.5	1	0	8	1
Goff	2	9	4.5	1	1	10	0
	25	143	5.7	6	3	65	2

Receiving	No	Dp	Att	Yds	Avg	FD	25	Lg	Td
Jones II	6	1	10	54	9.0	2	0	18	0
McCaffrey	5	0	12	72	14.4	3	1	28	0
Fitzgerald	5	0	7	50	10.0	3	0	12	0
Jones Jr.	2	0	7	28	14.0	1	0	22	0
Gallup	2	0	3	69	34.5	2	1	54	0
	20	1	39	273	13.7	11	2	54	0

Receiving	No	Dp	Att	Yds	Avg	FD	25	Lg	Td
Kelce	6	1	14	72	12.0	3	0	17	0
Fournette	4	0	8	27	6.8	1	0	8	0
Godwin	3	0	8	49	16.3	3	1	26	1
Waller	2	0	4	27	13.5	1	0	16	0
Sherman	1	0	1	5	5.0	0	0	5	0
Westbrook	1	0	2	15	15.0	1	0	15	0
Thompson	1	0	2	19	19.0	1	0	19	0
	18	1	39	214	11.9	10	1	26	1

Fumbles	No	Rec	Td
Fitzgerald	1	0	0
	1	0	0

Fumbles	No	Rec	Td
Fuller	0	1	0
	0	1	0

Kick Returns	No	Yds	Avg	Lg	Td
Grant	2	54	27.0	29	0
	2	54	27.0	29	0

Kick Returns	No	Yds	Avg	Lg	Td
Roberts	2	54	27.0	34	0
	2	54	27.0	34	0

Punt Returns	No	Fc	Yds	Avg	Lg	Td
Rogers	1	2	4	4.0	4	0
	1	2	4	4.0	4	0

Punt Returns	No	Fc	Yds	Avg	Lg	Td
Roberts	2	0	21	10.5	16	0
	2	0	21	10.5	16	0

Kicking	FG	Lg	XP	Pts
McLaughlin	2-2	31	1-1	7

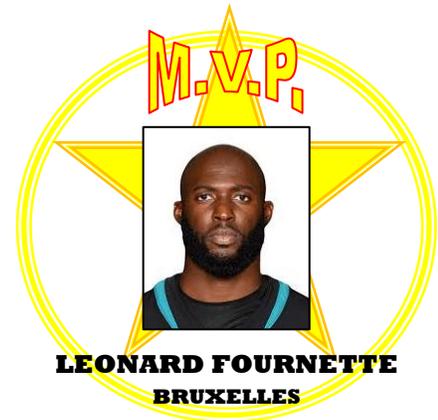
Kicking	FG	Lg	XP	Pts
Prater	1-3	46	3-3	6

Punting	No	Yds	Avg	Tb	20	Bk	Lg
Way	3	154	51.3	0	0	0	56

Punting	No	Yds	Avg	Tb	20	Bk	Lg
Kern	5	225	45.0	1	2	0	52

Defense	Tkl	Sk	Def	Stf	Hur	FF	Int
Davis,T	15	0	1	3	0	0	0-0
Adams	6	0	3	0	0	0	0-0
Conley	4	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Carter	4	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Terrell	3	0	1	0	0	0	0-0
Alonso	3	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Smith	1	0	0	0	2	0	0-0
Hall	1	0	0	0	1	0	0-0
Jarrett	1	0	0	0	1	0	0-0
Chung	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Williams	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Moore	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Bethea	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
McCoy	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Skura	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
McLaughlin	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Butler	0	0	0	0	1	0	0-0
Rankins	0	0	0	0	1	0	0-0
	45	0	5	3	6	0	0-0

Defense	Tkl	Sk	Def	Stf	Hur	FF	Int
Kuechly	12	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Smith,H	8	0	2	0	0	0	0-0
Flowers	5	0	0	0	3	0	0-0
Smith,P	5	0	0	0	1	0	0-0
Moreau	4	0	1	0	0	0	1-8
Slay	4	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Phillips	3	1	0	0	1	0	0-0
Dupree	3	1	0	0	0	0	0-0
Clark	3	0	0	1	7	0	0-0
Hargreaves	2	0	2	0	0	0	0-0
Ogbah	2	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Ladouceur	2	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Casey	1	1	0	0	0	0	0-0
Fuller	1	0	1	0	0	1	1-0
Thomas III	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Davis	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Wilson,L	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
	58	3	6	1	12	1	2-8



LEONARD FOURNETTE
BRUXELLES

134 total yards and a TD led the way.
65-yard run sparked the offence.

Team Stats

	Chino	Virden
First Downs	12	23
Rushes	19-60	24-109
Passes	37-25-184	36-20-248
Sacked	4-28	2-16
Fumble	3	1
Penalties	7-45	4-35
Turnovers	2	0
Missed Tackles	6	4
Dropped Passes	1	0
Bad Passes	2	4
Passes 25+	0	1
Runs 10+	0	5
Blitzers	20	2
Time	30:40	29:20
Third Down	3-15	3-10
Fourth Down	2-4	0-1
Red Att/Td/Fg	0/0/0	3/2/1
Net Offense	216	341



19

Cowtown



20

Brooklin

TEAM LEADERS

Passing	Cmp	Att	Yds	TD
Garoppolo	17	30	214	1
Rushing	Car	Yds	Avg	TD
Gurley II	13	71	5.5	0
Receiving	Rec	Yds	Avg	TD
Evans	5	96	19.2	1

Team	1	2	3	4	OT	Total
Cowtown	0	13	3	3	-	19
Brooklin	0	0	6	14	-	20

TEAM LEADERS

Passing	Cmp	Att	Yds	TD
Carr	34	45	400	3
Rushing	Car	Yds	Avg	TD
Hyde	8	13	1.6	0
Receiving	Rec	Yds	Avg	TD
Hopkins	8	87	10.9	1

Play of the Game

In the 4th quarter, 1:04 remaining, Hawks trailing 19-13, the Brooklin line picked up the blitz, giving **Derek Carr** time to locate **Breshad Perriman** for a 22-yard game-winning TD pass.

CARR CARRIES HAWKS OVER KINGS!

DEREK CARR THROWS FOR 400 YARDS AND 3 TDs IN 2ND HALF RALLY!

SUMMARY: The Cowtown defence did something that no team had done during the regular season; shut out the high-powered Brooklin offence in the 1st half. While the Hawks managed to move the chains early, two costly interceptions in Cowtown territory – one by TJ Watt and one by Xavier Woods – stopped them in their tracks and resulted in a pair of Joey Slye field goals going back the other way. On the other side, two mis-timed tackle attempts by Hawks defenders gave Mike Evans room to gallop 60 yards down the sideline for the game's first touchdown, after snaring a short out from Jimmy Garoppolo, giving Cowtown a 13-0 lead going into half time. The 2nd half did not start off any better for Derek Carr and the Brooklin offence. On their third play from scrimmage Carr threw his third pick of the day, this time to linebacker Roquan Smith, and the Corn Kings added a 47-yard Slye field goal to extend their lead to 16-0. The third miscue seemed to light a fire under the Brooklin QB. Carr came back on their next possession, overcoming a holding penalty with a 27-yard hitch to Breshad Perriman then a 16-yard toss to DeAndre Hopkins to enter Cowtown territory at the 40-yard line. Three plays later, Carr connected with Perriman on a short slant that the wide-open receiver took 18 yards to the house for a major. However, the extra point failed and the home team entered the final period down 16-6. The Corn King defence held on Brooklin's next possession and it looked as if their offence was heading in to drive home the knife after Todd Gurley II broke a tackle and ripped off a 21-yard run – his longest this season. But the Corn King offence, inexplicably, went for the field goal on third down, with Slye hitting again from 47 yards to extend their lead to 19-6. This strange move seemed to re-set the momentum and, playing with urgency, Carr went to the air, hitting Hopkins for a 16-yard TD after Ronald Darby was flagged for interference the play before. Brooklin got the ball back at their 11, with 3:55 left and proceeded to drive the length of the field, surviving a fumble by Randall Cobb, to take the lead on Perriman's second TD catch of the game. Cowtown got the ball back with 0:42 left and all of their timeouts, but the inability to get out of bounds cost them and they ran out of time trying to set up for the game-winning field goal.

QUOTES: "I had a flashback to my days as an assistant offensive coordinator for the Alouettes. I take full responsibility for that call. Having said that, the way our defence was playing, give credit to the Hawks for overcoming the challenge and pulling out the win." – Cowtown coach, Jim Coghlin "I never felt we were out of the game. We have had to come from behind all season and we did it again. Derek does not get enough credit for his mental toughness. He put the rough start behind him and made the throws when we needed them most." – Brooklin coach, Tom Jones.



HAPPY FAN



titter

ANGRY FAN



Orville Smucker @Smuckerscoop I was reminded of Marv Levy's decision to go for it on 3rd and 3 in the 1975 Grey Cup. It didn't work out, so I understand why coach kicked the FG.



Bird Man of Brooklin @BirdMan Maybe this game will restart the conversation about @derekcarrqb being elite. And the defence makes up in character what they lack in talent.



Cowtown 19 Brooklin 20



	1	2	3	4	F
Cowtown	0	13	3	3	19
Brooklin	0	0	6	14	20

* Playoff * 02-08-2021 Optimist Park Temp:18 Wind:0-5 None No Line MVP:Carr H

2	9:34	Cowtown	FG	Slve 33 (12-63-7:05)	3-0
2	3:01	Cowtown	FG	Slve 29 (10-34-3:49)	6-0
2	1:39	Cowtown	TD	Garoppolo 60 pass to Evans (Slve) (1-60-0:15)	13-0
3	5:04	Cowtown	FG	Slve 47 (12-40-6:22)	16-0
3	0:53	Brooklin	TD	Carr 18 pass to Perriman (no good) (6-75-4:11)	16-6
4	10:39	Cowtown	FG	Slve 47 (4-24-2:09)	19-6
4	7:16	Brooklin	TD	Carr 16 pass to Hopkins (Bullock) (7-68-3:14)	19-13
4	0:52	Brooklin	TD	Carr 22 pass to Perriman (Bullock) (10-89-3:06)	19-20

Passing	Att	Cmp	Yds	25	In	Td	Sk	Rate
Garoppolo	30	17	204	1	0	1	1	88.8
	30	17	204	1	0	1	1	88.8

Passing	Att	Cmp	Yds	25	In	Td	Sk	Rate
Carr	45	34	400	2	3	3	1	96.5
	45	34	400	2	3	3	1	96.5

Rushing	Att	Yds	Avg	FD	10	Lg	Td
Gurley II	13	71	5.5	3	2	21	0
Garoppolo	5	22	4.4	2	1	10	0
Bell	5	11	2.2	0	0	7	0
Boone	1	11	11.0	1	1	11	0
Washington	4	7	1.8	0	0	3	0
Lazard	1	4	4.0	0	0	4	0
	29	126	4.3	6	4	21	0

Rushing	Att	Yds	Avg	FD	10	Lg	Td
Hyde	8	13	1.6	1	0	8	0
Carr	2	9	4.5	1	1	10	0
	10	22	2.2	2	1	10	0

Receiving	No	Dp	Att	Yds	Avg	FD	25	Lg	Td
Evans	5	0	7	96	19.2	4	1	60	1
Conley	5	0	9	55	11.0	4	0	14	0
Humphries	2	0	6	12	6.0	0	0	7	0
Bell	2	0	4	11	5.5	0	0	7	0
Gurley II	1	0	1	11	11.0	1	0	11	0
Washington	1	0	1	10	10.0	0	0	10	0
Sprinkle	1	0	1	9	9.0	1	0	9	0
Carrier	0	0	1	0	0.0	0	0	0	0
	17	0	30	204	12.0	10	1	60	1

Receiving	No	Dp	Att	Yds	Avg	FD	25	Lg	Td
Ingram	8	0	10	87	10.9	5	0	14	0
Hopkins	8	0	12	87	10.9	5	0	16	1
Perriman	4	0	5	81	20.3	3	1	27	2
Cobb	4	0	5	52	13.0	2	0	19	0
Breida	3	0	3	22	7.3	1	0	11	0
Scott,B	3	0	5	26	8.7	1	0	10	0
Hyde	2	0	3	8	4.0	0	0	5	0
Jefferson	1	0	1	31	31.0	1	1	31	0
Fells	1	0	1	6	6.0	1	0	6	0
	34	0	45	400	11.8	19	2	31	3

Fumbles	No	Rec	Td
	0	0	0

Fumbles	No	Rec	Td
Cobb	1	0	0
Scott,B	0	1	0
	1	1	0

Kick Returns	No	Yds	Avg	Lg	Td
Harris	3	46	15.3	20	0
Sheffield	1	17	17.0	17	0
	4	63	15.8	20	0

Kick Returns	No	Yds	Avg	Lg	Td
Barner	2	66	33.0	37	0
	2	66	33.0	37	0

Punt Returns	No	Fc	Yds	Avg	Lg	Td
Harris	1	2	8	8.0	8	0
	1	2	8	8.0	8	0

Punt Returns	No	Fc	Yds	Avg	Lg	Td
Barner	2	1	13	6.5	8	0
	2	1	13	6.5	8	0

Kicking	FG	Lg	XP	Pts
Slve	4-4	47	1-1	13

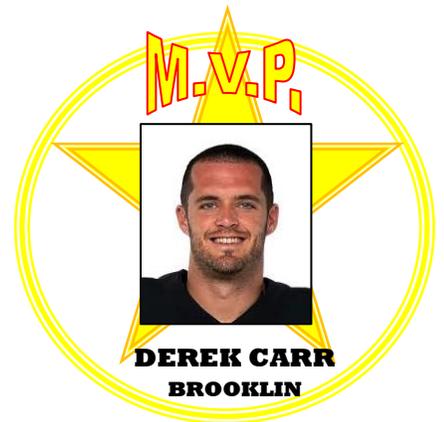
Kicking	FG	Lg	XP	Pts
Bullock	0-1	0	2-3	2

Punting	No	Yds	Avg	Tb	20	Bk	Lg
Hekker	5	197	39.4	0	2	0	49

Punting	No	Yds	Avg	Tb	20	Bk	Lg
Scott,J	3	126	42.0	0	0	0	47

Defense	Tkl	Sk	Def	Stf	Hur	FF	Int
Woods	9	0	1	0	0	0	1-33
Davis III	9	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Watt	6	1	1	1	1	0	1-25
Smith	5	0	0	0	0	0	1-7
Darby	3	0	1	0	0	1	0-0
Coleman	3	0	1	0	0	0	0-0
Sheffield	3	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Kerrigan	3	0	0	1	0	0	0-0
McLeod	2	0	2	0	0	0	0-0
Neal	2	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Vitale	2	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Addae	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Kennard	1	0	0	1	0	0	0-0
Ioannidis	0	0	0	0	2	0	0-0
	49	1	6	3	3	1	3-65

Defense	Tkl	Sk	Def	Stf	Hur	FF	Int
Apple	10	0	1	0	0	0	0-0
Simmons	7	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Hubbard	5	1	0	0	1	0	0-0
Matthews	5	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Vander Esch	5	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Harrison,R	5	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Jones,J	4	0	1	0	0	0	0-0
Williams,B	3	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Bates III	2	0	1	0	0	0	0-0
Ferrell	1	0	1	0	0	0	0-0
McDougald	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Gunter	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Harrison,M	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Taylor	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Tranquill	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Bullock	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
	53	1	4	0	1	0	0-0



400-yards passing on day and 3 TD passes in 2nd half to lead comeback.

	Cowtown	Brooklin
First Downs	16	23
Rushes	29-126	10-22
Passes	30-17-204	45-34-400
Sacked	1-8	1-3
Fumble	0	1
Penalties	7-66	6-40
Turnovers	0	3
Missed Tackles	3	6
Dropped Passes	0	0
Bad Passes	1	2
Passes 25+	1	2
Runs 10+	4	1
Blitzers	28	2
Time	30:56	29:04
Third Down	6-15	3-8
Fourth Down	1-1	0-1
Red Att/Td/Fg	3/0/2	2/2/0
Net Offense	322	419



AROUND THE



With Spats McChad

NEW YORK – It feels like every year at this time I feel the need to express my dissatisfaction with the current EFL playoff formula that calls for the bottom two playoff-eligible teams in each conference to fight it out for the privilege of playing a rested division-winner in the quarter finals. I grasp the reasons behind it. Awarding a tangible benefit to division-winners by giving each a bye seems fair-minded on the surface. Its equity depends, however, on the presumption that winning a division is an objectively tougher task than qualifying for a wildcard spot. We have seen over the years that is not always the case. For example, this year, the Mustangs ran roughshod over weak competition in the South Division, which gave them not just the division title, but helped them secure the no.2 seed as well. The three main contenders for the Atlantic wildcard spots – Brooklin, Cowtown and Scarborough – all faced tougher competition over the course of the season. Any one of those could have won the South Division this year. The division system, which is based historically on geography, is an unreliable barometer for ranking. It is a relic of a much earlier time, when travel was long and expensive and people thought of regions as having some inherent sovereignty that made it important to segregate competition accordingly and accord equal weight to each champion. Very United Nations-like in concept. Despite the fact that divisions are almost never created equal, the division system holds up well enough overall that nobody is motivated to change it. So, we grant a special and equally-weighted honour to winning a division, regardless of how the divisions are constituted.

The other reason is the EFL's reluctance to expand the playoff pool to that invisible red line of 50%. The line is set on the ideal that making the playoffs should be a meaningful accomplishment – more exclusive than inclusive. In the present formula, slightly less than half the teams (42%) make the post-season, which is uncomfortably close to that forbidden 50%. The addition of the second wildcard team in each conference was, in fact, a sop to those who wanted more playoff teams. But the fundamental playoff formula of quarters/semis/final involving 4 teams in each conference is unchanged from the inception of the league. All that has been added is an intermediary step to determine the 4th seed. That step creates the inequity of having that 4th seed entering the final four beaten up, therefore weaker than a natural fourth seed and even easier prey for the no.1 seed.

I have thought about how I might design the post-season, aware that the EFL does not care what I think, but personally not caring that the EFL does not care about what I think because I know that some fans whose thoughts the EFL cares about are, to some degree, influenced by what I think and, therefore, the EFL *has* to care what I think.

I tend to agree with the 50% red line. A 16-game season is long for a sport based on violence – it *should* cull the herd in a meaningful way. But what is a scheduler to do with five playoff teams per conference, other than what the EFL is already doing? You can't flip the scenario around and have the two top seeds fight it out for the no.1 seed while the lower seeds sit out a week and watch. The only way to make it more equitable would be to revert back to 4 playoff teams (3 division-winners + 1 wildcard) or expand to 6 playoff teams (3 division-winners + 3 wildcards) and give the top two division-winners a bye while the bottom four seeded teams battle it out to see which two teams advance to the quarter finals. But such an arrangement would violate the 50% red line which, although imaginary, should be respected in my view.

So, I guess there isn't any other way to resolve it other than the current system, unless...the...EFL...*expands!* Count me in for that! I am interested in your opinion...for once. Let me know how you feel about the EFL playoff format.

OPTIMIST NINE

In the middle of the most surprising and exciting season in the five-year Brooklin phase of the franchise's existence, Coach **Tom Jones** promised that if the Hawks landed a home playoff game, fans would be allowed to attend at Optimist Park. When he made that promise, his team was 7-3 and he was intoxicated with the high of having beaten the North Stars for the second time this year. Things were looking up and, despite losing their next two games – including an embarrassing stumble at home against the Irish – in the end, fortune continued to favour the never-say-die offence and the fiercely plucky defence of a Hawks team few had predicted would survive into the post-season. It looked like Jones would have to deliver on his promise.

The Hawks wrapped up the no.4 seed before the final week was upon them, guaranteeing them a home date. The deliriously happy Brooklin faithful ventured into the street (responsibly distanced from each other and masked, of course) to line up in front of the Optimist Club for tickets to the big game. (That's the way they do it in Brooklin for non-season ticket holders. The general public must physically line up as part of the club's bot-prevention strategy and to keep attendance "community-based"). It had not occurred for a second to the eager throng that the office would be closed and there would be no tickets to purchase.

In addition to forgetting that he had made the promise in the first place, the Brooklin coach had not never approached the

local authorities to negotiate a permit to allow fans into the stadium. Despite being the most open venue in the entire EFL, Optimist Park had remained closed to fans throughout the pandemic. Although locals were able to glimpse some of the live action on the field by looking through the gaps in the stands from select vantage points on Watford Street, Cassels Road, and the roof of Winchester Public School, officially not a single “fan” had borne live witness to any of the Hawks’ home successes in 2020.

The tyranny of the health authorities in the Town of Whitby – inside of which the unincorporated community of Brooklin is situated – was suffocating compared with the rest of Durham Region’s municipalities. **Dr. Fiona de Toqueville**, an unnaturally black-haired woman in her late fifties with visibly white roots and tilted spectacles that tended to obscure her eyes, wielded her influence as Whitby’s Chief Medical officer like a truncheon. With the pedantry of a school marm she smashed all resistance to strict mask mandates and limits on social gatherings through a continuous series of daily press conferences. At these, she would, as a grim and necessary reminder, painstakingly recite all of the existing rules in place to prevent the spread of COVID-19 before introducing a new rule of the day. Her list of rules and “recommendations” had grown quite long and the length of her press conferences had grown with it. The local cable news channel built their programming around the doctor’s addresses, pushing aside local high school volleyball and the popular *What’s Cooking?* – a show that tours the many churches in the community and compares pot luck dinner menus. Her sound bites dominated local mainstream news. If one never ventured out of their house, one would have the impression that Whitbyites were dying in the streets rather than enjoying the lowest COVID-19 test numbers in the region.

This unshakeable despot was what stood between coach **Tom Jones** and his promise to bring fans into the stadium for the playoffs. He had a little less than a week to make a breakthrough and he had to be clever about it, because all of the usual appeals to humanity fell on deaf ears when requests to the city fell on Dr. de Toqueville’s desk for her review. On her stern advice, permits that would have allowed enough pall-bearers to carry caskets at funeral gatherings had been denied. City staff had long ago stopped bothering to put applications to increase the size of wedding ceremonies in front of her. “The bride, the groom, two witnesses and a justice of the peace– what more do they need to get married?” she invariably would say.

In fact, the Hawks were lucky to be able to play homes games at all. The doctor had blithely recommended cancelling the season when asked to sign off on the order that granted an exemption to the five-person gathering limit for Hawks home games to enable teams to take the field. It had taken an open threat from the EFL to permanently relocate the Brooklin franchise to convince Mayor **Don Mitchell** to rein in his Health Inquisitor in this one instance. This had the effect, however, of turning the doctor into an implacable foe of Hawks football. An appeal to her to allow fans inside Optimist Park might have actually caused her to laugh – had she been capable of the act.

Jones and a delegation of Hawks officials initially approached Mayor **Don Mitchell** directly with their request via a *Zoom* call, in the hope of by-passing the health department. But when the doctor’s face popped up on the monitor, her eye-less face staring back at them coldly through the screen, they nervously back-tracked and requested, feebly, to have the Mayor to come out for the coin toss.

The Mayor jumped at the opportunity, but suddenly caught himself and added, “if it is safe to do so, of course. Doctor?”

After a lengthy pause, followed by a lengthier dissertation on the perils of the virus “of which we know so little,” Dr. de Toqueville, reluctantly agreed, on the condition that the coin was sanitized, the participants wore gloves, goggles and double masks, and that the Mayor promptly leave the stadium thereafter.

Embarrassed and humiliated after the call, the Hawks’ officials met amongst themselves to discuss how they would spin this failure to the fans, who were becoming increasingly impatient. A downcast **Tom Jones** looked at the downcast faces of the President of Operations, the Vice-President of Marketing and the smirking visage of Capologist, **Smedley Ricklebaum**.

“Why are you smiling, Smed?” Jones asked finally.

“Did you hear that song playing in the background when the doctor was speaking?” he answered with a question. The doctor, except when she was pontificating at her press conferences, worked from home like most people.

“I heard something,” Jones answered. “I wasn’t paying much attention.”

“You should pay more attention to the owner’s work,” Ricklebaum chided. “That was one of his songs.”

The Hawks majority owner was **Tom Jones**, the singer. It was just coincidence that the GM/Coach of the Hawks was also named **Tom Jones**. This had created confusion more than once. However, like **Bruce Springsteen** was to the Wrecking Balls, **Tom Jones** the singer was to the Hawks – more of a silent partner. Unlike Springsteen, however, **Tom Jones** the singer rarely attended Hawks games. In fact he had only set foot in Optimist Park once – for the home opener in 2016. He was still embarrassed at having sunk money into the franchise believing it was to be located in Brooklyn, NY, rather than hidden in a bedroom community sharing the GTA market with four other EFL teams. He held on to his share as an investment, just in case somebody with deeper pockets wanted to purchase the team and move it to a place with people.

“I was just thinking,” Ricklebaum said with the rise of an eyebrow. “The doctor might be a fan of Tom Jones, the singer. You know they aren’t playing *‘She’s A Lady’* on the radio anymore! That had to be on her playlist.”

“She doesn’t seem like she’s a fan of anything with a soul,” Jones the coach said “What are you suggesting?”

“I say we schedule another call with her and the Mayor. This time we’ll ask the doctor to be included, making it look like we aren’t trying to hide anything and wish to defer to her advice,” Ricklebaum started to grin. “Instead of the Tom Jones she despises, we put the real Tom Jones on the call to make the appeal for fans. We’ll need the owner to agree, of course.”

Tom Jones, the coach, looked the President of Operations and the Vice-President of Marketing, as if seeking an opinion.

“It’s worth a shot,” the V-P of Marketing remarked after a lengthy pause.

“I’ll make the call to the big guy,” the President offered.

As luck would have it, **Tom Jones**, the singer, had time on his hands. His touring had been severely curtailed by the pandemic and his staple Las Vegas shows were not running at the moment. After being briefed on the problem, he agreed to make the appeal.

On the Wednesday before the wildcard game, Hawks executives and owner, **Tom Jones** joined the Mayor of Whitby and Dr. De Toqueville on a *Zoom* call. The doctor’s expression was colder than usual; her mouth set in a straight line, her thin eyebrows furrowed and her eyes barely detectable behind her tilted spectacles. She looked down at her notes. She was clearly ready for battle.

After a brief exchange of tense pleasantries, the President of Hawks Operations spoke:

“Thank you for agreeing to meet with us, Mayor Mitchell. We have another request to put forward on behalf of the Hawks’ owner, Tom Jones, who is joining us on this call.”

At the word “call” **Tom Jones’** video switched on and the old singer’s face appeared. His curly hair and neatly-coiffed moustache and goatee were grey. His skin was bronze and wrinkled and his cheeks were beginning to sink. But his eyes twinkled and a smile crept mischievously onto his face as he took in the *Zoom* room, erasing about 20 years from his appearance.

“Good morning Mayor and good morning, good doctor!” he nodded at each. “Thank you so much for taking time out of your busy days to hear my request. You know, I hope you don’t take this the wrong way, but I was not expecting the doctor to be a lady, for some reason,” then he broke into a singing refrain, “*She’s a lady! Whoa, whoa, whoa, she’s a lady!*”

For a split second, Dr. De Toqueville’s eyes flashed visible behind her glasses. They were wide and dark. Her eyebrows lifted. She had evidently been caught off guard, but the dictates of her office compelled her to recover quickly.

“I hope you are not implying anything by that remark...Mr...Jones?” her voice trailed off. She evidently wanted to ask the question but thought it beneath the dignity of her position to betray any lack of foreknowledge about the participants of the meeting. She had clearly expected the *other* Tom Jones to be in attendance.

“Yes, that’s correct, Tom Jones. Sir Thomas Edward Woodward to be honest, but people know me by Tom Jones,” he chuckled. “Although the number of people who actually know my songs is dwindling, so I might be more easily confused with a football coach now.” The *Zoom* room seemed to chuckle at the self-effacing humour. The doctor did not, but her mouth bent strangely – not a smile, but more like a wave. It could have meant anything.

Sir Thomas continued. “Of course, I am not implying anything negative by that, I apologize if it appeared that way. I am from a simpler time and I sometimes forget the times in which we live are more...complicated,” he paused to think then let the subject drop.

“Yes, we live in complicated times, Mr. Jones,” Dr. De Toqueville declared, breaking into the sermonizing tone she was comfortable with. “And it is made much more complex by the presence of this insidious virus that threatens us all. I trust you do not retain the old world view of viruses – that they can be fought off by a bowl of chicken soup and a glass of whisky.”

Sir Thomas protested to the contrary and launched into a laundry list of precautions he personally takes to avoid contracting the virus. When he had shown sufficient deference to the virus, he gently turned the topic to his live performances and the effects of an audience on his ability to sing. He talked about the songs themselves, describing in detail how the passion in his delivery in this line and that line would rise with that of the crowd. He described faces in the front row and the energy that came from their expressions. He then subtly weaved all of these feelings into the image of a crowd at a sporting event, adding that the unknown of what was to come in sports added to the thrill of the experience, both for fan and player. He finished off:

“It does not require 20,000 people to inspire an athlete or a performer,” he said, as if he was divulging some overlooked and profound truth. “I remember a show I did at a Colorado country club many years ago. A snowstorm had closed the roads to the venue and we were going to cancel the show. But nine people had already arrived and they were stuck. So were me and my crew. We decided to let the show go on. Those nine people were so appreciative that they sang along with every word and clapped and screeched until they were raw. It was infectious and it resulted in one of the best performances of my career. I believe there is a tape of it floating around, but I cannot find it. But that doesn’t matter to me, because I remember it like it was yesterday. That’s what nine fans and the snow of Colorado was able to do to *me* – a professional who has performed live thousands of times. I call it – the power of nine.”

There was a long pause beyond the length common to *Zoom* calls. It had been a masterful soliloquy. Dr de Toqueville’s eyes were suddenly visible behind the veil of her lenses. She was blinking rapidly and the corners of her mouth threatened to curl upwards into a shape approximating a smile. She was clearly in torment. Her eyes dipped abruptly and she unmuted her audio.

“It’s not unusual, I suppose, for performers to want to perform in front of a crowd,” she spoke deliberately, weighing her every word. “It’s not unusual for a crowd to want to have fun with anyone. But crowds empower the virus to ravage those who form them. No matter what you say you find it happens all the time,” she trailed off. Was there a hint of musical cadence in her delivery of such words that sounded vaguely familiar, but out of context? She looked up suddenly. “But, from what I understand, you aren’t asking for a crowd, Mr. Jones. You are asking for nine people to attend your team’s football game. Provided they wear masks and goggles; and each of them sits in different sections of the stands, I do not see a problem with admitting nine fans.” She became officious once more. “Mayor Mitchell, it is my medical opinion that, provided conditions set forth in the appendices of the agreement are met, it is safe to admit nine fans to Optimist Park for the game this Sunday.”

The Mayor readily agreed and moved to close the meeting before the Doctor changed her mind. As absurd as it was to draw the line at nine, he was aware that nine was better than zero, and zero was the good doctor’s position virtually every time she considered applications to increase the size of public gatherings.

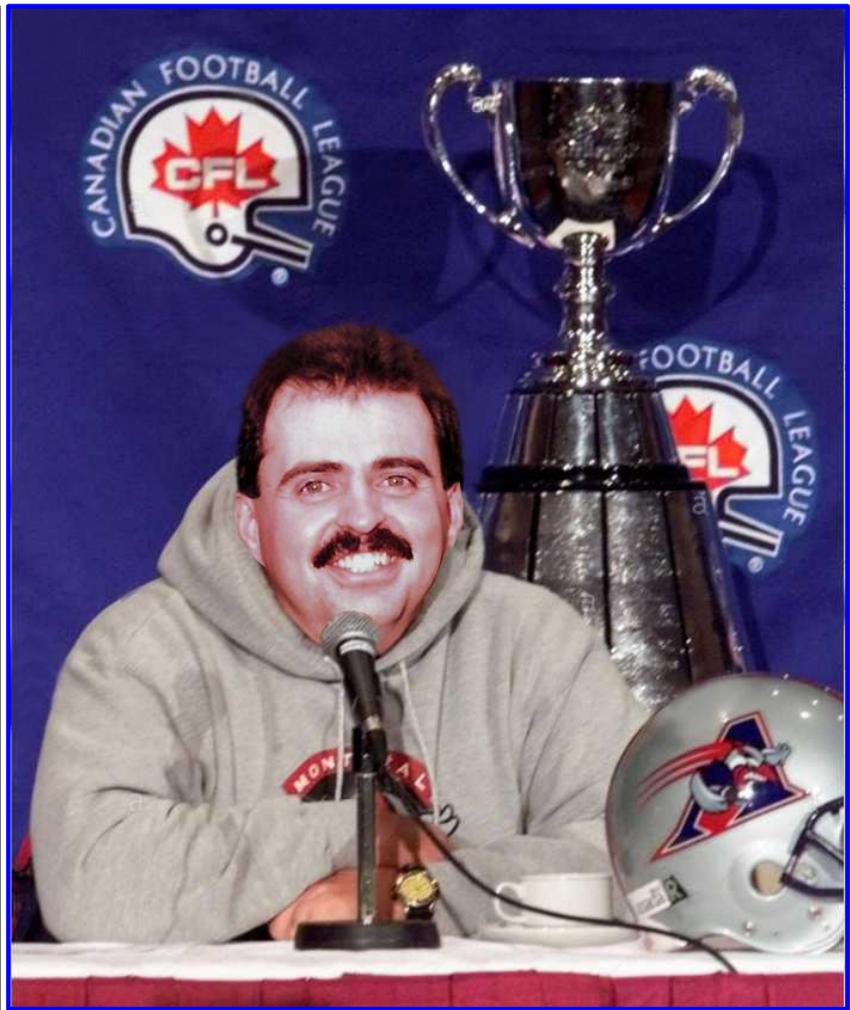
Before the Hawks' President of Operations could attempt to clarify that the team was actually seeking permission for 9 *thousand* fans to attend the game, the meeting ended with an electronic 'bloop.' They were now stuck with having to sell nine tickets.

The announcement that only nine fans would be permitted to attend the game was met with fan fury that flared up in a typically Canadian way, with a strongly worded series of tweets, posts and e-mails expressing anger and discontent, but quickly subsiding and always ending with the question of how one could get one of the tickets.

The team, in consultation with local authorities, decided to hold a lottery. Season ticket holders were automatically entered into the lottery, but would have to compete with the local public. Non-season ticket holders could purchase a lottery number as long as they were Whitby residents. The winners would be announced on Saturday afternoon, the day before the game.

The line-up to purchase lottery numbers – with people having to stand 6-feet apart – stretched literally around the town. One lottery number per resident; proof of residency required. As a result, entire families waited in line, hoping to increase the odds that the Hawks fan(s) in the household would land a ticket. Most of them never bothered to read the fine print stating that the ticket was non-transferable.

Finally, the day of the draw came and the winners were announced with all of the fanfare associated with winning a major lottery, including the presentation of giant novelty tickets, 6' x 4' in size, emblazoned with giant Hawks and Corn Kings helmets, and the Section Number where the fan could sit, prominently displayed in each of the four corners of the ticket.



Cowtown head coach, **Jim Coghlin**, shown here when he was the assistant offensive coordinator with the Montreal Alouettes in 2002. The Corn Kings coach had a flashback to those days when he opted to kick a field goal on third down in the 4th quarter of his team's 20-19 loss to Brooklin.

Profiles of the winners were published in the *Brooklin Town Crier* the night before the game, according to which, the nine are:

- 1 – **Edith Whalen**, 42 years; a nurse at Lakeridge Health in Oshawa, resident of Whitby.
- 2 – **Dr. Sylvester Schitz**, 53 years; a Toronto proctologist, resident of Whitby and Hawks season ticket holder.
- 3 – **Brent Davis**, 31 years; general labourer at Brooklin Concrete Products Inc, resident of Brooklin.
- 4 – **Kevin Drake**, 60 years; retired Toronto police officer, resident of Whitby and Hawks season ticket holder.
- 5 – **Keara Graves**, 21 years; actress, singer, resident of Whitby.
- 6 – **Bolbat Preena**, 27 years; sales associate, Rogers, Scarborough, resident of Whitby.
- 7 – **Amy Little**, 3 years; attends Little Orchard Day Care, resident of Brooklin.
- 8 – **Ryan McDonald**, 19 years, electrical engineering student at Durham College, resident of Brooklin.
- 9 – **Frank Dunn**, 56 years, on disability pension, can be found at the Beer Store on Baldwin Street, resident of Brooklin.

This collection of souls would hardly be considered typical of the football fan demographic at a pre-COVID Hawks' home game. But the stresses of the pandemic had created a mania around the tickets and a burning desire to get out of the house for any reason. Almost the entire town had entered the lottery.

The presence of actress **Keara Graves** grabbed widespread attention. Although she had never been to a football game before, she soon asserted herself as the public face of what would become known as the 'Optimist Nine.' She transformed herself with surprising ease into a zealous supporter of Hawks' football, despite not knowing any of the players' names or any of the game's rules. It didn't really matter. She looked good in a Hawks jersey and sounded like she really cared.

Discussion about what to do about pre-schooler, **Amy Little** (whose father Chuck was an insanely-devoted Hawks fan who had tried to sign up the family dog for a lottery number) dominated an emergency meeting of town council. According to the Health ruling, only nine fans were permitted. Adding a child's guardian would make it 10. **Doctor de Toqueville**, who may have come to regret her original recommendation to allow even the nine, would not budge on the number. The condition of sale – that the ticket was not transferrable – could not be reversed without opening up the legal possibility of the other tickets being scalped at horrendously high prices. In the end it

was determined that a paid duty police officer from Durham Region's youth services would be hired to look after the 3-year-old. Paid Duty police officers were considered necessary in order to enforce the Health Regulations and were therefore exempt from restriction if there was a demonstrated health enforcement purpose for having them. In this case, the officer would be officially hired to "prevent Amy from straying into other sections looking for her parents and unwittingly spreading the virus."

Local Brooklinites were bitter that **Frank Dunn**, the town drunk, had lucked himself into a ticket. Brooklin's iconic *Beer Store* panhandler was usually unable to string a sentence together by closing time. His purpose for entering the lottery in the first place was to sell the ticket for beer money. It was thought that he would most likely spend the entire game at the beer concession.

Of the remaining six, the two season ticket holders – **Dr. Sylvester Schitz** and retired police officer, **Kevin Drake** – were devoted Hawks fans, but came nowhere close to the bellowing, antic-driven "super fan" type the team had hoped-for to liven the atmosphere. They would be restrained, to say the least. Nurse, **Edith Whalen** was similar, but at least she wore a Hawks scarf, waved a Hawks pennant and called out 'Go Hawks' after every first down. **Bolbat Preena** was a cricket fan who, like Frank the drunk, had entered the lottery as an investment only to find he was stuck with a use-it-or lose-it ticket. He decided to use it to get out of the house. Only **Brent Davis** and **Ryan McDonald** could likely be relied upon to demonstrate unrestrained fanaticism by dressing up or dressing down in the 18°F game-day temperature. On cue, the 31-year-old concrete worker showed up on game day dressed as 'Hawkman' and the 19-year-old college student showed up shirtless, with a sea blue and algae-green number '4' painted on his chest and back.

Game time finally arrived. The networks had been primed to cover the unique and, to outsiders, very strange fan situation. Interviews with team and city authorities were aired in the pregame show. The 'Optimist Nine' were followed by camera crews as they presented their huge tickets at the gate, entered the stadium, and took their sections. **Frank Dunn**, aware in some deep un-sauced recess of his brain that this was a big deal, had dressed up for the occasion. He wore a dusty grey three-piece suit and had taken the effort to shave and grease his hair back. He smiled the smile of a semi-conscious dolt as he walked stiffly through the turnstiles.

Amy Little was frightened by the light of the cameras. She began to cry as the TV crew pressed in and an overly made-up **Melanie Collins** bent over her with a microphone and asked in a light, cooing voice, "Are you excited to see your Hawks play, sweetie?"

"*Whaaaaaa!*" little Amy answered as her reddening face scrunched up in terror. She tried to run away, only to be picked up by Constable Brown, her escort for the afternoon, and carried toward the concession stand. "Ice cream! I'll need some ice cream!" the constable barked as she strode briskly away from the TV crew.

Keara Graves, who plays a character named Grace on a Netflix show called *Grand Army*, had transformed herself magically into a Hawks diehard. She was dressed stylishly in the highest end Hawks attire, which included a mask with a Hawks logo and ornamental hawk tattoos on her forehead. She bounced through the turnstile and danced to her section, singing a homemade cheer featuring the words, 'Fly High! Swoop Down! Pluck the Corn from beneath the Crown! Gooooooooohhh HAWKS!'

Dr. Sylvester Schitz and **Kevin Drake** made a conscious effort to retain their dignity in front of the bright lights and camera flashes. But the pressure to perform in some way in front of the cameras was too much. Eventually Drake let out an awkward, 'Let's go Hawks... ye-aaah!' followed by tired fist pump and a feeble 'whoop!' Dr. Schitz smiled smarmily and declared, "I am really hoping the Hawks will win today!" Not surprisingly, TV viewers would not see much of the proctologist and the retired police officer for the rest of the afternoon.

Edith Whalen entered unpretentiously, beaming from ear-to-ear, waving her Hawks pennant and punctuating each of her sentences with a loud 'Go Hawks!' She looked genuinely happy. As a woman approaching middle age, she was not reflective of the predominant football fan demographic in Brooklin, or anywhere else. This fact led the networks to focus on her increasingly throughout the game, once it became clear from her commentary that she knew football and knew her team.

As the only person of colour in the 'Optimist Nine,' **Bolbat Preena** initially drew a lot of attention from diversity-conscious CBS. But he proved to be a disappointment. Instead of Hawks paraphernalia, he wore his Rogers company jacket. He could have easily passed for a technician from Rogers there to fix a cable connection. When asked why he thought the Hawks would win, he smiled nervously and replied, "Because Hawks have power to fly. What does a corn have? It sits in the ground then it is eaten. Hawks are high, high, high! Corn is low, low, low! Hawks go!"

Ryan McDonald made a classic crazy college kid entrance, wearing his painted nakedness from the waist up as an up-and-in-your-face badge of courage and whopping like a blue-painted berserker straight out of Braveheart. "Aren't you a little cold without a sweater or jacket?" **Tracy Wolfson** asked him when he had finally stopped howling.

"Are you kidding? It's warm out here today because my Hawks are hot, hot, HOT! *Whooooo!*" he bounced on his feet while taking a swig from a plastic bottle. It was certainly not water he was drinking.

Brent Davis, in his 'Hawkman' costume, rounded out the nine. He made an attempt to look both imposing and mysterious at the same time. When approached by reporters, he clenched his teeth and fists and growled lowly, "Hawkman cometh!" then spread his wings by raising his arms in a simulated glide into the stadium.

Like the Hawks themselves, the 'Optimist Nine' had trouble putting things together in the first half. Their physical separation and the fact that they did not know each other prevented any coordinated effort to lift the spirits of their struggling team. And struggle the Hawks did. **Derek Carr** was intercepted twice and **Randy Bullock** missed a long field goal as the offence was shutout through 30 minutes for the first time all year. The defence played better, but gave up a 60-yard touchdown on a short sideline pass to **Mike Evans** that made the score 13-0 for Cowtown heading into half time. If something did not change in the second half, the Hawks would see their

wings slowly plucked and they would find themselves permanently grounded.

Somebody in the Hawks' organization got a bright idea. With security at skeleton levels due to the pandemic, there were plenty of spare walkie-talkies lying around. These were circulated to the 'Optimist Nine' at half time so that they could talk to each other during the game. It would lift their spirits and prove to be a game-changer.

The second half started out much like the first. Carr was intercepted on the Hawk's opening series and the Corn Kings replied with a field goal to make the score 16-0. Finally, the Hawks gave the 'Optimist Nine' something to cheer about as the third quarter wound down. **Breshad Perriman** took a short slant from Carr and ran it in 18 yards for a touchdown. Brooklin was finally on the board, but Bullock's missed extra point put a damper on the achievement. The sense that the Hawks were about to lose their grip completely came on their next series, when Carr was stuffed for a loss trying to convert a 4th & 1 at the Cowtown 46. The Corn Kings took over at their 47 and were in a position to put the game away if they could drive back 53 yards and get the ball in the end zone.

Despite Brooklin loading the box and gunning for him, **Todd Gurley** exploded through a big hole opened up by **Cordy Glenn** and **Danny Vitale** and rumbled for 21 yards to the Brooklin 32. It was Gurley's longest run of the season and the only time he looked close to the game-breaker he had been in previous seasons. It was now deathly quiet on the Brooklin sideline. The Corn King sideline bristled with anticipation. Both teams sensed the moment of decision was approaching.

Out of the blue it came: '*Fly High! Swoop Down! Pluck the Corn from beneath the Crown! Gooooooooohhh HAWKS!*' '*Fly High! Swoop Down! Pluck the Corn from beneath the Crown! Gooooooooohhh HAWKS!*'

The players looked up and around. At first they could not tell where the cheer was coming from. It seemed to come from above and all around. And then they saw them: The half-naked teenager pounding his painted chest and running the length and breadth of his section; the impressive figure of 'Hawkman,' standing arms raised, looking like a war totem in the top row; the swirling, dancing figure of the actress with the light but penetrating voice, singing clear as a bell and directing the rest of the chorus with artful hand gestures; the unsteady drunk in the tattered suit on the verge of total intoxication, whose leathery voice boomed louder than any other; the steady alto of the woman in the scarf waving a pendant, whose voice seemed to rise above the others at *Gooooooooohhh HAWKS*; the police constable gently bobbing a tiny girl in a blue snow suit up and down with the rhythm of the chant while the little one bawled, '*Fy hy, soot ton, buck a co-keens f-beef da cown. Gooooooo Haks!*'; the nervous guy in the Rogers jacket rocking back and forth as he attempted the lyrics, compensating for his lack of enunciation by adding ornamental, high-pitched '*eyah-eyahs*,'; and finally the duet of the doctor and the retired police officer, whose muddled voices combined to create an echo effect as they struggled to keep the rhythm.

Coach **Jim Coghlin** of the Corn Kings looked up into the stands, surprised by the sound of fans he had not even known were there. The steel benches of Optimist Park, the deranged painted kid running around with no top and the roaring drunk reminded him of his trips to Saskatchewan when he was an assistant with the Montreal Alouettes of the CFL. Those were the days. He had been on the staff when they won the Grey Cup in 2002. It was the only time he had been associated with a championship-winning team. For a moment he was lost in those happy thoughts before he was snapped out of it by his assistant asking him, "Coach, play?"

Coach Coghlin looked up at the scoreboard. It was 3rd down & 7 at the Brooklin 29. This was a no-brainer. Why go for it when your kicker, **Joey Slye**, seemed to have the magic boot going? He had hit one from 47 yards earlier and had made it look easy. "Field goal," he said with authority.

His assistant paused. "What?" he asked.

"Field goal, I said!" Coach Coghlin replied, betraying a hint of annoyance then added, "Do you think I'm an idiot?"

His assistant stared at him for about 3 seconds, considering the question, then shrugged his shoulders and sent the field goal unit onto the field. A surprised **Joey Slye** had to be called away from the practice net. Quarterback **Jimmy Garoppolo** came off the field looking dumbfounded. Even the Hawks weren't sure what was going on, but their defence remained disciplined as Cowtown lined up for the field goal. The kick was good, giving the Corn King a 19-6 lead.

But the successful field goal was beside the point. Rather than run another play and perhaps gain a first down, the Corn Kings had kicked a field goal on 3rd down and had handed the ball back to their opponent after just three plays from scrimmage. The defence did not know what to make of it. Confusion enveloped the Corn Kings' sideline while, in the background, the hexing pulse of the chant of the 'Optimist Nine' further addled their brains.

When his defensive coordinator finally approached him for an explanation, Coach Coghlin irritatingly replied, "I'm not going for it on 3rd down there, that's crazy! I'd be repeating the mistake they made when they went for it on 4th &" he stopped himself. The Hawks had gone for it on *fourth* down. "Oh f^ck!" he sighed as he realized his error. At the moment he had been asked for a play he was, in his mind, back in the CFL – a league with no fourth down. As a result, he had kicked the ball on third down.

From that point on, the Cowtown coach was not himself and neither was his team. Sensing some type of weakness the Hawks and their nine fans came alive. The offence drove the field twice, under the steady hand of their quarterback, scoring touchdowns on both possessions to take a 20-19 lead with just 52 seconds left in the 4th quarter. The 'Optimist Nine' celebrated elatedly, but soon returned to the chant after **Edith Whalen** reminded everyone over the walkie-talkie that the Corn Kings had all three of their timeouts left and only had to get into field goal range to possibly win the game.

But the morale and the momentum was squarely on the Hawks' side. After a first down pass of 12 yards to **Chris Conley** and a 10-yard scramble by Garoppolo for another first down, the Hawks' defence went into all-out swarming mode. The Corn Kings were forced, through lack of execution, to use all three of their timeouts prematurely. With time ticking away, the Corn Kings' field goal unit

raced onto the field after *Mike Evans* had been prevented from getting out-of-bounds on the previous play. Before they could get lined up time ran out and the gun sounded on a 20-19 come-from-behind Brooklin win. Given the way their season had played out, it was not really a surprise that they did it this way – roaring back from a deficit while getting the defence they needed when they needed it most.

Although Carr had looked good in the game's final quarter, the previous three quarters had not gone well for him or the offence. In fact, the Hawks had looked like a team destined for defeat most of the game. What had happened to turn it around?

"To be honest, I think our fans – all nine of them – deserve a game ball," Brooklin coach **Tom Jones** said after the game. "They came alive at our lowest point. There was something voodoo-like about that cheer they came up with, out of nowhere. If that third down field goal was a mistake, it was a strange one. It came very soon after that chant started. You'll have to ask the other coach about that."

Coach Coghlin declined to directly answer questions about the third down field goal, insinuating that his reasons had to do with not wanting to see his quarterback sacked on a third and long. But, of course, my dear readers, you and I know the truth. I not only have my sources inside every EFL team, but the field mics pick up almost everything that is said on the sidelines in these pandemic-ravaged stadiums. In the end, this controversy doesn't matter very much. Cowtown or Brooklin – Budapest will feast in the next round.

BRUXELLES SPROUTS

The Chino season ended on such a down note that it seems almost cruel that the *Football Gods* (yes, they exist!) allowed them to proceed to the post-season. But they did, and the beatings continued, with Bruxelles bringing out the paddle at The Fortress to tap out the Convicts by a score of 24-13.

The playoffs sometimes bring surprises in performance, resulting from players reacting in unpredictable ways to the pressure of the stage, or the installment of special game plans "saved" for the occasion. Sometimes the playoffs simply reaffirm the patterns established over the regular season. In the case of the Pacific Conference Wildcard round, it was the latter.

The Convicts' offence, after moving clinically up the field for a touchdown on their first possession, never found the end zone again. It was another example of the scripted game plan working, followed by a failure to adjust to the adjustments of the defence thanks largely to a disappointing effort in the clutch by wannabe franchise quarterback, *Dak Prescott*. He was intercepted twice and stuffed for a 2-yard loss attempting to convert 4th & 2 at the Bruxelles' 3-yard line early in the 4th quarter. I have been critical of the Convicts' offence in the past, thinking that it features too many pass plays that start within five yards of either side of the line of scrimmage, making it safer for the defence to play in-tight. But it could be that the coach doesn't feel he can trust his quarterback to air it out. On Prescott's first of only two attempts of 15 yards or more downfield, he was picked off by *Kyle Fuller*. The second attempt was nearly picked off by *Darius Slay*. For the game he completed just 20 of 40 pass attempts, gaining a big chunk of his 273 yards on individual efforts from *Christian McCaffrey* and *Michael Gallup*, the latter doing it himself on a 56-yard catch-and-run in the 4th quarter to set up their last field goal.

For Bruxelles, the catalyst was once again, *Leonard Fournette*. Coming straight on the heels of the Convicts' opening drive touchdown, his 65-yard run fell on the warning track at the 2-yard line, short of a homerun, but close enough that he was able to bunt himself home with a two-yard run off left tackle on the next play. The highlight-reel run and the sure finish gave the Bombers a 10-7 lead and sparked a confident, solid showing on both sides of the ball throughout the remainder of the contest. Although the Convicts ended up possessing the ball nearly 8 minutes longer than the Bombers, it was Bruxelles that appeared to be in control through the last three quarters. This was due to the inordinate pressure being brought bear on the Chino quarterback by the front seven of the defence. *Frank Clark* and *Trey Flowers* failed to register a single sack between them, but they were a menace in the backfield all day, forcing Prescott to run around like the last survivor in a game of manhunt. The Bruxelles' defence set the table for the offence to eventually succeed despite erratic targeting by *Jared Goff*, who completed less than 50% of his 39 pass attempts for just 214 yards. The best that can be said about the Bombers' quarterback in this game is that he protected the football and made a nice throw to *Chris Godwin* on the 3rd-quarter touchdown pass that made the score 24-10 and pressed the Chino offence against the wall. No doubt, Goff will have to be more consistent if the Bombers are to survive their trip to *TERRODOME* next week.

Although the game itself bordered on the mundane, the broadcast was livened up by the presence of *Brussels Times* reporter, **Faart van Wijnendaele** as a guest commentator in the broadcast booth with **Kenny Albert** and **Jonathan Vilma**. The Belgian native was the Bombers' local beat reporter and ardent champion in a culture that preferred individual sports like cycling and tennis. FOX had signed him for the playoffs to bring an international perspective to the game.

While long term readers will recall my accounts of lengthy and insightful conversations with the Bombers' beat writer at the 2017 Championship in Avalon, centered on the psychology of American football, Faart was otherwise unknown to North American football fans. And while he made some interesting and very candid observations – such as "*Dak Plesscote tinks he is like a Pat Mahomes but he eez not,*" and "*how does a guy like Goff be drafted in de fast round?*" – most people will remember him primarily for his heavy accent and his comment at the end of the game: "*Theese ween is a god ting for Brussels' sprouts.*" By "sprouts" he meant "sports," of course, but it did not take long for the memes to appear of lush fields of Brussels sprouts with the header, Bombers Bring Bumper Crop.

DR. McCHAD'S POST-SEASON POST-MORTEM

Before we finally and irreversibly shift our attention to the post-season battle between the final four in each conference, let us consider one last time those who are left behind. 14 teams gave up their seasons so that ten could move on. That ten is now down to eight. Failure is a crucial part of success, the dark side of the moon orbiting around a planet named Competition. So, what about those failures? How, and why, did they fail? As a certified Sports Coroner, it is my solemn duty to examine the fallen and determine what caused their death. Here, dear Readers are my findings:

BUFFALO (8-8) – Cause of Death: *Lamaria*. The Derailers thought they had the division in the bag when they traded away the 6th pick

in the draft, their 3rd, 5th a 2nd in 2021 and Julio Jones for the most dangerous raw offensive talent in the game. The problem was that it ended there. Lamar Jackson was the be-all and end-all of an ill-fated push to dominate a division of lesser quarterbacks. Lamar showed that he could do it all, most of the time, until he couldn't. 16 starts, 553 drop-backs and 236 carries (more than most starting running backs) drained the life out of him. As he gradually broke down, curled up and died, so did the Derailers' playoff hopes.

PEG CITY (8-8) – Cause of Death: *Iceberg Collision*. The Crusaders were not exactly the *Titanic* of the Pacific Conference, but few doubted that the refitted *HMS Crusader* would cruise to a wildcard berth if they fell short of the Division title. They won their first three games, but would be forced to divert course when they entered the North Atlantic in Week Four. Scarborough's win that week was the first of a surprising series sweep by the Atlantic North Division, resulting in four losses that ultimately sunk their chances.

SEATTLE (7-9) – Cause of Death: *KIA*. The Pilots of 2020 fought like a veteran battalion on the front line. They held their ground against long odds during the day and made surprise advances under cover of night. Their collective warrior mindset and team ethic made them be all that they could be most of the time. Tragically, half the unit were conscripts, out-gunned and ill-supplied. Many a medal was won in the fight by individuals like Sam Darnold and various members of the defence. But in the end, they fell.

SEBASTIAN (7-9) – Cause of Death: *Haskins Disease*. Acquired to develop under the tutelage of veteran *Drew Brees*, second-year quarterback *Dwayne Haskins* was injected into the game plan to keep opponents off balance. But his occasional presence on the field knocked the Swordfish offence off balance. Later forced into full-time action when Brees went down to injury, Haskins pushed the Sebastian offence off a cliff. His TD to INT ratio of 17-5 and QB rating of 42.2 proved ultimately fatal to their cause.

ERIEAU (7-9) – Cause of Death: *Eriosis of the Arm*. Top QB prospect, *Kyler Murray* entered the league boasting a strong arm and strong legs. Now fans are wondering where that big arm went after a season of struggles getting the ball out on time and on target. His mobility prevented the season from becoming a disaster. The same thing happened to *Matt Stafford* – the big-armed stud who couldn't throw after coming to Erieau. There must be something in the water down in Cadillac Country.

SCARBOROUGH (7-9) – Cause of Death: *Chronic Burrowholism*. This is no knock on the no.1 overall pick, *Joe Burrow*, but his fast learning and maturity beyond his years may have sent the wrong message to his coach. An excitement like a "two-beer buzz" at his evident ability and promise for the future led Blue Eagle management to believe "the future is now." They kept ordering more Burrows making his arm the focus of the offence. They passed the ball almost 60% of the time, despite having a workhorse in *Chris Carson* behind him. The better defences laid ambushes for the rookie, but the Burrowholic coaches were too blind drunk to see.

YORK (6-10) – Cause of Death: *Regicide*. The Excaliburs marched into 2020 with a plan to play sound, positional defence and ride *King Henry* through enemy lines with fire support from *Tom Brady* and...well, that part hadn't been thought through during the off-season. A shortage of ammunition on the edges meant Henry drew most of the fire from enemy trenches. Every volley slowed him down a little more and with him the whole offence. This lumbering behemoth was unable to cover ground quickly and got cut down.

LAS VEGAS (5-11) – Cause of Death: *Schizophrenia-Induced Suicide*. When assassins fight their inner demons, their prospective victims can breathe easily. Las Vegas rarely put it all together on the same day. Their Week 13 win over Chino, featuring a flaming *Carson Wentz* and a defence that crushed the run and held up on third down was an example of what they *could*, but did *not* do most of the other 15 weeks. When the defence was on, Wentz was off. When Wentz was on, the defence was off. Self-annihilation!

EAST ELMHURST (5-11) – Cause of Death: *Multiple Gunshot Wounds*. That the Irish managed to win 5 games is a positive testament to their morale and confidence. That five wins was their ceiling is a testament to the damage done by trading away *Aaron Rodgers* and *Saquon Barkley* for futures that may, or may not, work out. It was impressive to watch them strut into a gun fight every week wielding a sword and dressed in a loin cloth and still do damage. But fanatical bravery without firepower has its limits.

PICKERING (4-12) – Cause of Death: *Stillborn*. The Spartans' plan from the outset seemed to be simple survival. They were unable to do even that, although their 'Never Surrender' ethos kept them alive for long enough to avoid the league's cellar. The offensive line offered no protection for the immobile *Philip Rivers*; nor did it open holes for *Miles Saunders*, who refused to put his body on the line in a lost cause and ended with a 3.1 average. The defence gave it their all – which wasn't much. They were dead on arrival.

CHARLESWOOD (4-12) – Cause of Death: *Starvation*. The Patriots had no plans to compete in 2020. This was obvious from their off-season moves – ones which took away their defensive stars and left the backend starved of talent. But the offence looked relatively promising with *DeShaun Watson* at the helm and *Alvin Kamara* in the backfield. Hungry to prove themselves, Watson and Kamara were frustrated by a simple playbook that even their talent could not overcome. Starved for creativity, they withered away.

NEW JERSEY (3-13) – Cause of Death: *Crash and Burn*. The Wrecking Balls were never who they thought they were coming into the season, but they were never thought to be this bad. Built ambitiously to "win it all," they were, at best, a good team likely to make the playoffs and bow out early. But with visions of league domination embedded in their coaches' heads, they played an unbalanced, aggressive style that was well above their means. They travelled at a speed they could not handle and crashed and burned.

GEORGIA (3-13) – Cause of Death: *Fatal Bender*. The player that had once held the offence together was a broken down, physical wreck before the start of the season. As for the defence...ha...*what* defence! The Gladiators, wedded to *Big Ben*, but preparing for the worst, went with *Tua Tagovailoa* as their big developmental project at quarterback. It was a project doomed to failure for lack of support, but it was hoped that the rookie would learn something playing for the actual worst team in the league. Hopefully, he did.

TWIN CITIES (2-14) – Cause of Death: *Trevorinitis*. Bringing in an interception machine like *Jameis Winston* to replace the steady, if frustratingly limited, *Mitch Trubisky*, was a curious gamble for a coach who values his reputation as a competitor. At best it was a boom-or-bust move. At worst, it was sabotage. One thing is for sure – Trubisky and Winston never looked like the long-term answer. Winston's awful play and Trubisky's *trubiskyness* guaranteed the Triumph won't have to worry about either, ever again.

BUG THE BOOKIE!

JIMMY THE GEEK GIVES YOU HIS PICKS
FOR WILCARD WEEKEND EFL ACTION

Your source for fantasy and on-line betting solutions



RECORD VS THE SPREAD AFTER WILDCARD WEEKEND: 107-81-6

Jimmy's QUARTER FINALS PICKS

PACIFIC CONFERENCE QUARTER FINALS

BRUXELLES @ VIRDEN (line – VIOLATORS by 7)

INJURIES: **Chino** – Damiere Byrd (QUESTIONABLE), Donte Jackson (OUT), Melvin Ingram III (OUT), Takkarist McKinley (OUT); **Virden** – Nigel Bradham (QUESTIONABLE), Lane Johnson (QUESTIONABLE), Anthony Barr (DOUBTFUL), Ben Watson (OUT).

The Bombers, as a team, looked convincing in their wildcard victory over Chino. The same cannot be said for their quarterback Jared Goff, who looked suspicious, completing less than 50% of his passes against the 23rd-ranked defence in pass completion percentage allowed. The Convicts' secondary did not cover itself in glory in 2020 – in fact it hardly covered anybody at all – yet Goff struggled to connect with his targets last week. Goff's season-long struggles with accuracy could be the Bombers' undoing against the league's most prolific scoring attack. With Patrick Mahomes leading the Virden offence, it goes without saying that Leonard Fournette needs to contribute in a big way, both to keep the ball out of the hands of Mahomes and to set up his quarterback for the play action opportunities he needs to be effective. On the other side, the talented but erratic Bomber defence needs to focus against a Violator offence with lots of weapons. The elusive, golden-armed Mahomes knows how to use them and, when the defence happens to take them away, is fully capable of scrambling out of trouble for first downs and more. Not to be forgotten is the Virden defence. While gash-able when defending the run – something it does not need to excel at given opponents are coming from behind most of the time – it is the 4th stingiest in points surrendered and second overall in takeaways. The lack of depth in the secondary makes the defence vulnerable to spread sets, but a stout front seven compensates. The Violators are unquestionably the favourite and should win. The flawed, but tenacious Bombers have a way of hanging around. Expect this to be uncomfortably close for the Anointed One. **PICK: BRUXELLES**

IOWA CITY @ COBB COUNTY (line – COYOTES by 6)

INJURIES: **Iowa City** – None; **Cobb County** – None.

After almost surreal domination of the league over 15 weeks, the Coyotes fell off their stride in a Week 16 loss to Bruxelles, resulting in them giving up the no.1 seed. Ryan Tannehill started, but looked markedly off during his brief stint, before giving way to Teddy Bridgewater. Analysts are unsure what to make of this. Is the historical Tannehill poised to return at the exact wrong time for this year's Golden Boys? This one-game setback coupled with the Cubs' impressive surge over a six-game win streak to finish the season has moved the line down from -8 to -6 for the favourites. The Cubs boast a top-five offence, albeit one prone to slumping on occasion. Russell Wilson gets the deserved lion's share of the credit for the overall success, but Joe Mixon has posted one of the quietest 1,300-yard seasons in history and will be absolutely vital to the Cubs' chances in this game. If the Coyotes are allowed to sit on the pass, it will be a very tough climb, even for a Wilson-led offence. If Tannehill was just keeping his powder dry for the playoffs in the final week and plays as efficiently as he did during the regular season here, it is tough to envision the Cubs stopping the Coyotes. This means they will need to win via the shootout route. In that scenario, the Coyotes' defence has the extra stop or two in them to turn the tide in their favour. Here is betting on Tannehill returning to mid-season form. **PICK: COBB COUNTY**

ATLANTIC CONFERENCE QUARTER FINALS

BROOKLIN @ BUDAPEST (line – NORTH STARS by 4)

INJURIES: **Brooklin** – Xavier McKinney (OUT); **Budapest** – None.

The Hawks won another 4th-quarter cliff-hanger last week to advance to the quarter finals. The team that was four successful two-minute drills away from a 6-win season continues to put their fans on the edge of their seats and drive opposing defences to distraction. The Hawks are certainly the last team the North Stars wanted to face in the playoffs. Brooklin has beaten them twice this year in manners so anomalous that it felt like supernatural intervention. This week will tell whether the Hawks are truly the North Stars' implacable nemesis, or simply a team that got lucky twice against the no.1-ranked team in the Atlantic Conference. There are many who claim that winning three games against a single opponent in one season is very, very hard to do. Yet, if past performance is an indicator of future performance, the Hawks' season-sweep gives legitimate cause for pause before biting on the relatively modest line in the Stars' favour. If, on the other hand, defence wins championships, the Budapestians look destined to sweep Brooklin aside here in their quest for the ultimate prize. Since losing to the Hawks in Week Ten, the North Stars have given up an average of 6 points per game. While the offence has bordered on pedestrian for most of the season, it has not affected the bottom line much. Why be too aggressive when the defence has things well in hand? With the North Stars well-rested and the Hawks coming off a tough game and an intercontinental flight, don't be surprised if the Brooklin offence is slow off the mark. The question will be whether Aaron Rodgers can take advantage while Brooklin offence loosens up. If the Stars were cocky before, they certainly are not now. Expect a most methodical and well-crafted game plan from Mr. Jones, designed to extract the most of the North Stars' ultimately superior talent. **PICK: BUDAPEST**

DURHAM @ AURORA (line – MUSTANGS by 4)

INJURIES: Durham – Isaiah Johnson (OUT); Aurora – None.

The last time the Lizards lost was in Week Ten to these same Mustangs. Since that game they have mostly dominated the competition over a six-game win streak, looking like the team many analysts had envisioned they would be prior to the start of the season. Aurora has won five in a row after losing in Week Eleven to powerhouse Cobb County. Like Durham, they have looked well in command over that stretch. The sharp ascendancy of both teams in the domination department gives the impression that a clash of titans, one that will rock the foundations of the football world, is about to occur. I think that is mostly an illusion. While these teams are closely matched, their apparent mastery of the art of football in the final stretch of the regular season came on the backs of questionable, or outright inferior, competition. It did demonstrate, however, what most of us knew heading into the season: That the talent on these teams made them virtual shoe-ins to be among the final four in the Atlantic Conference. When they faced each other in the regular season, the Durham offence was smothered by a rare virtuoso performance by the Mustangs' defence – one in which they played the pass and somehow managed to stop both the run and the pass. The Lizards converted just one of 10 third down attempts and zero of two fourth down plays, while the Mustangs' literally ran over the Durham defence for 221 yards on the ground. Obviously, if the Durham offence does not improve on that dismal showing it will likely result in another early playoff exit for a team with a history of disappointing post-season play. The Mustangs have no reason to alter their game plan, apart from making advanced preparations to adjust if things don't go as sparkingly well as last time. The key for Durham will be stopping the run and putting Aurora into a come-from-behind position. The key for Aurora will be to repeat their Week Ten success. Don't expect them to catch lightning in a bottle twice. **PICK: DURHAM**



CHANNEL
ANCIENT HISTORY
CHANNEL
PRESENTS
This Week in EFL History
With Professor Sterling Smitherman

FROM THE EFL ARCHIVES – At this time 6 years ago the Quarter Finals were already getting underway. Wildcard Weekend did not exist in 2014. The wildcard teams were the third and fourth seeds in the quarter final round – the next best teams after the division winners.

So, which teams were the wildcards back in 2014? In the Pacific, it was Twin Cities Triumph in the East and the Chino Convicts in the West. In the Atlantic, the Pickering Spartans entered from the North after losing the tie-breaker to Durham, and the South Carolina Regulators survived a three-way tie to sneak in at 8-8.

With the exception of the Regulators, the playoff teams were all closely-matched. This was the indisputable cream of the 2014 field. As a result, three of the four quarter finals match-ups were expected to be close.

The 16-0 Aurora Mustangs were 16-point favourites at home over the Regulators. Many thought that spread was too narrow. There was no doubt who would win that one.

The 12-4 Thunder Lizards were 6-point favourites over the 12-4 Spartans. This was considered by most to be too wide a margin, but the Lizards had won 8 of their last 9 games heading into the post-season and had walloped Pickering 41-24 in their last meeting. The Durham defence was expected to be the difference-maker in the home team's favour.

The 13-3 Cannibals were favoured by 5 over the 11-5 Triumph. This was mostly because **Jay Cutler** was the Triumph starter and few had confidence that he would be able to deliver in the clutch.

Finally, the 12-4 Banana Sluggs came in 3-point favourites against the 12-4 Convicts. Santa Clara had been expected to mow down all comers in the regular season. The narrow spread indicated that their status of dominator was in doubt. This game was expected to be a defensive struggle.