

2014

QUARTER FINALS


**EFL NEWS**  
 ELITE FOOTBALL LEAGUE

2015

QUARTER FINALS

February 8, 2016



## EAST

## WEST

## NORTH

## SOUTH



TWIN CITIES

17



IOWA CITY

34



GWINNETT

20



COWTOWN

14



CHARLESWOOD

31



BEAUFORT

20

DURHAM

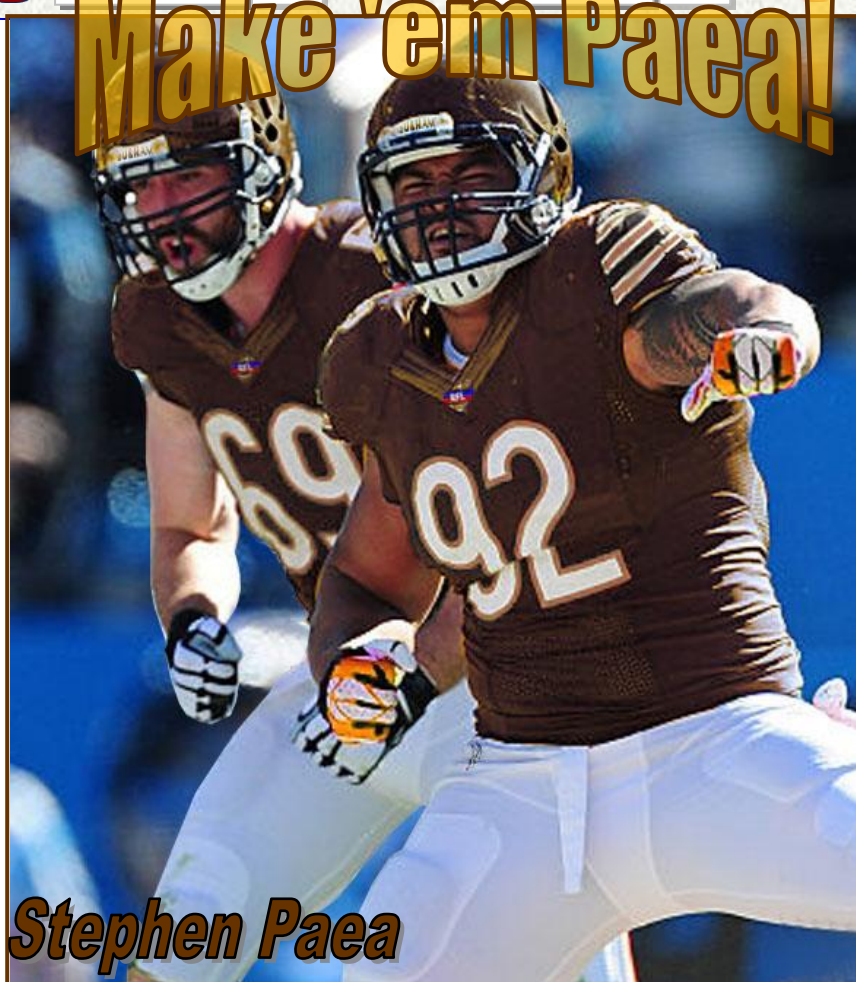
28



AURORA

31

# Make 'em Paea!



## Stephen Paea

### LATEST EFL NEWS INSIDE

- BREES BLOWS GLADIATORS OUT OF PLAYOFF RACE
- COWTOWN GAMBLE BACKFIRES AS MUSTANGS GALLOP TO VICTORY
- PEYTON ONE STEP CLOSER TO REALIZING HOME-COMING DREAM
- CUBS GET LAST LAUGH IN BEAUFORT

#### Also in this issue

- SPATS FEATURE, 'HEK OF A BAD CALL,' 'WHEEL OF FORTUNE' 'QUARTER FINAL ROUND-UP.'
- JIMMY THE GEEK

Thunder Lizards defensive lineman, *Stephen Paea*, celebrates his sack of *Ben Roethlisberger* that snuffed out a 4<sup>th</sup> & 1 gamble at the Durham 39 in 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter action at Jurassic Park. The Lizards would add to their early lead on the ensuing possession. (Story Inside....)



*Who was slick  
in the Quarter  
Finals?*

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



**Arian Foster**  
RB  
Aurora  
Mustangs

34 Carries, 161 yards, 2 TDs, 4 Rec., 41 yards. 'Stangs go-to guy.



**Casey Hauward**  
CB  
Iowa City  
Cubs

1 Tackle, 3 PDs, 1 INT. Leaping pick-six won the game in 4<sup>th</sup> qtr.



10-7-0



## CAN-AM QUARTER FINALS



14-3-0

Gwinnett

20

MVP

Drew Brees

28

Durham

## TEAM LEADERS

Passing	Cmp	Att	Yds	TD
Big Ben	25	44	269	1
Rushing	Car	Yds	Avg	TD
McCoy	21	56	2.7	0
Receiving	Rec	Yds	Avg	TD
Landry	12	112	9.3	0

Team	1	2	3	4	OT	Total
Gwinnett	0	3	6	11	-	20
Durham	7	7	0	14	-	28

## TEAM LEADERS

Passing	Cmp	Att	Yds	TD
Brees	19	35	217	3
Rushing	Car	Yds	Avg	TD
Hyde	7	38	5.4	1
Receiving	Rec	Yds	Avg	TD
Johnson	4	67	16.8	1

## Play of the Game

In the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter, trailing 17-14 after giving up a 14-point lead, the Lizards took over at their 34. In three plays, they were back on top to stay on a 47-yard TD pass from **Drew Brees** to **Eric Decker**.



## KEYS TO THE GAME

- 1 play of 20+ yards.
- LeSean McCoy limited to 2.7 yds per carry
- 0 for 2 on 4<sup>th</sup> down

## LIZARDS LURCH PAST GLADS!

### PENALTY IN 4<sup>TH</sup> HAS GLADS FUMING



## KEYS TO THE GAME

- 3 for 3 with 3 TDs in the red zone.
- Stingy 'D' held Glads to 1 red zone trip.

**SUMMARY:** On a calm, mild, but rainy day in Durham the Gladiators hoped to make it two in a row against the Thunder Lizards and earn a trip to the Conference Final, but they got off to an inauspicious start when **Shaun Suisham** missed a 41-yard FG attempt after a 10-play opening drive. Durham responded with a 69-yard TD drive, starting with a 35-yard short slant to **Calvin Johnson** and finishing with a 4-yard TD pass from **Drew Brees** to **Eric Decker**, to grab the early lead. The teams slugged it out without either gaining advantage until Durham DT **Stephen Paea** sacked **Big Ben** on 4<sup>th</sup> & 1 at the Durham 39. The defensive stop led to a sharp counter-drive that ended with **Carlos Hyde** crossing the goal line from 6 yards out for a 14-0 advantage. Gwinnett got on the scoreboard before the half with a 47-yard Suisham FG after a kick-off out-of-bounds by **Phil Dawson** gave them a short field. In the 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter, the Lizards' offence struggled, unable to gain a 1<sup>st</sup> down in three possessions. Meanwhile, a pass interference penalty on **Dominique Rodgers-Cromartie** on 3<sup>rd</sup> and long and an interception of Brees by cornerback **Jimmy Smith** led to a pair of long FGs, 47 & 48 yards, by Suisham to bring the Glads within 5 points. It appeared as if the tide was turning permanently in favour of the visitors when Roethlisberger started the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter with an 18-yard TD pass on a fade pattern to **Reggie Wayne** to cap a 75-yard drive, the longest possession of the day for either team. Now trailing for the first time, the Durham offence turned it around quickly with a 47-yard TD pass from Brees to Decker, on the third play of a 66-yard drive, to pull in front 21-17. The Gladiators answered with another FG, from 42 yards, to make it a one-point game with over 7 minutes to go. The Glads needed a stop and they got one by holding Hyde to a 2-yard gain on 3<sup>rd</sup> & 7 from the Durham 43, bringing on Durham punter **Thomas Morstead**. But a 15-yard roughing the kicker penalty on **Kyle Williams** gave the ball back to Durham at the Gwinnett 40. The Lizards pressed on, covering the remaining distance to the Gwinnett end zone in 3 minutes and scoring on a 5-yard TD pass to **Megatron**. Trailing by 8 with 2:04 left, the Glads still had a shot, but Durham corner **Richard Sherman** picked off Ben at the Durham 48 with 1:23 remaining to clinch the victory.

**QUOTES:** "It was another close game against a tough opponent. Drew managed to bring us home in the end, but it was like pulling teeth." – Durham Coach, **George Kaldis**.

"There was not one, single thing that cost us the game. Our ground game never got going, which hurt. That penalty on Kyle really hurt at a critical time. He was fighting through a block and it looked to me like he just nicked him. 15 yards is a big price for a nick." – Gwinnett coach, **Dave Birdsall**.

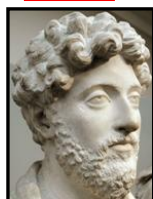


ANGRY FAN



titter

HAPPY FAN



Marcus Aurelius @MAXIV

The Gladiators were overmatched by a very small margin, making that roughing the kicker penalty a big blow.



Celine Dion @celinedion

Thees Tunder Lizard victory is for you René!





## Gwinnett 20 Durham 28



	1	2	3	4	F
Gwinnett	0	3	6	11	20
Durham	7	7	0	14	28

### Scoring

1	5:56	Durham	TD	Brees 4 pass to Decker (Dawson) (7-69-4:27)	0-7
2	4:16	Durham	TD	Hyde 6 run (Dawson) (9-53-3:48)	0-14
2	0:47	Gwinnett	FG	Suisham 47 (10-31-3:24)	3-14
3	7:21	Gwinnett	FG	Suisham 47 (13-56-6:39)	6-14
3	6:41	Gwinnett	FG	Suisham 48 (4-0-0:15)	9-14
4	14:16	Gwinnett	TD	Roethlisberger 18 pass to Wayne (2 - McCoy) (11-75-6:1)	17-14
4	13:13	Durham	TD	Brees 47 pass to Decker (Dawson) (3-66-0:57)	17-21
4	7:42	Gwinnett	FG	Suisham 42 (10-56-5:27)	20-21
4	2:14	Durham	TD	Brees 5 pass to Johnson (Dawson) (14-60-5:21)	20-28

### Player State

Passing	Att	Cmp	Yds	25	In	Td	Sk	Rate
Roethlisberger	44	25	269	0	1	1	2	73.0
	44	25	269	0	1	1	2	73.0

Rushing	Att	Yds	Avg	FD	10	Lg	Td
McCoy	21	56	2.7	2	0	9	0
Randle	2	5	2.5	0	0	5	0
Roethlisberger	3	3	1.0	0	0	1	0
	26	64	2.5	2	0	9	0

Receiving	No	Dp	Att	Yds	Avg	FD	25	Lg	Td
Landry	12	0	16	112	9.3	6	0	13	0
MacIn	6	0	13	86	14.3	6	0	23	0
Wayne	5	0	7	55	11.0	3	0	18	1
McCoy	1	1	6	4	4.0	0	0	4	0
James	1	0	1	12	12.0	1	0	12	0
Daniels.O	0	0	1	0	0.0	0	0	0	0
	25	1	44	269	10.8	16	0	23	1

Fumbles	No	Rec	Td
Roethlisberger	1	0	0
Wayne	0	1	0
	1	1	0

Kick Returns	No	Yds	Avg	Lg	Td
Landry	2	70	35.0	41	0
	2	70	35.0	41	0

Punt Returns	No	Fc	Yds	Avg	Lg	Td
Ellington	1	1	0	0.0	0	0
	1	1	0	0.0	0	0

Kicking	FG	Lg	XP	Pts
Suisham	4-5	48	0-0	12

Punting	No	Yds	Avg	Tb	20	Bk	Lg
Lee	2	101	50.5	0	1	0	51

Defense	Tkl	Sk	Def	Str	Hur	FF	Int
Smith,S	7	0	2	0	0	0	0-0
Beasley	5	0	0	1	0	0	0-0
Burnett	4	0	2	0	0	0	0-0
Jennings	4	0	1	0	0	0	0-0
Kendricks	4	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
DeCoud	4	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Laurinaitis	3	0	0	1	0	0	0-0
Daniels,M	2	1	0	0	0	0	0-0
Maulaluga	2	0	1	1	0	0	0-0
Sheard	2	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Smith,J	1	0	0	0	0	0	1-0
Moore,W	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Reddick	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Brown	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
McClain	1	0	0	1	0	0	0-0
Fletcher	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
	43	1	6	4	0	0	1-0

Passing	Att	Cmp	Yds	25	In	Td	Sk	Rate
Brees	35	19	217	2	1	3	1	89.8
	35	19	217	2	1	3	1	89.8

Rushing	Att	Yds	Avg	FD	10	Lg	Td
Hyde	7	38	5.4	3	0	9	1
Bradshaw	6	31	5.2	2	0	9	0
Davis,M	2	7	3.5	0	0	8	0
Sherman,A	2	1	0.5	1	0	3	0
Brees	3	-2	-0.7	0	0	0	0
	20	75	3.8	6	0	9	1

Receiving	No	Dp	Att	Yds	Avg	FD	25	Lg	Td
Gordon	5	1	7	36	7.2	1	0	11	0
Johnson	4	0	9	67	16.8	3	1	35	1
Decker	3	0	8	61	20.3	2	1	47	2
Hilton	2	0	3	18	9.0	0	0	11	0
Sherman,A	2	0	3	12	6.0	0	0	7	0
Hyde	1	0	1	3	3.0	0	0	3	0
Gates	1	0	1	11	11.0	1	0	11	0
Bradshaw	1	0	1	9	9.0	0	0	9	0
McFadden	0	0	1	0	0.0	0	0	0	0
Bush	0	0	1	0	0.0	0	0	0	0
	19	1	35	217	11.4	7	2	47	3

Fumbles	No	Rec	Td
	0	0	0

Kick Returns	No	Yds	Avg	Lg	Td
Hester	3	68	22.7	30	0
Hyde	1	23	23.0	23	0
Dreacher	1	15	15.0	15	0
	5	106	21.2	30	0

Punt Returns	No	Fc	Yds	Avg	Lg	Td
Hester	1	1	12	12.0	12	0
	1	1	12	12.0	12	0

Kicking	FG	Lg	XP	Pts
Dawson	0-0	0	4-4	4

Punting	No	Yds	Avg	Tb	20	Bk	Lg
Morstead	4	192	48.0	1	2	0	50

Defense	Tkl	Sk	Def	Str	Hur	FF	Int
Rodgers-Cro	9	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Davis,T	8	0	0	1	0	0	0-0
Davis,D	7	0	1	0	0	0	0-0
Sherman,R	6	0	1	0	0	0	1-10
Murphy	6	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Paea	5	2	1	0	0	0	0-0
McCourtly	3	0	1	0	0	0	0-0
Hayden	3	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Allen	2	0	0	1	3	0	0-0
Carter	2	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Dumervill	2	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Goldman	1	0	0	0	0	1	0-0
Jones	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Rowe	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Mathieu	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Davis,C	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Houston	0	0	0	0	1	0	0-0
Joseph	0	0	0	0	1	0	0-0
	58	2	4	2	5	1	1-10

M.V.P.



**DREW BREESE**  
**DURHAM**

He threw game-winning 47-yard TD pass to Eric Decker in 4<sup>th</sup> quarter.

	Gwinnett	Durham
First Downs	20	15
Rushes	26-64	20-75
Passes	44-25-269	35-19-217
Sacked	2-17	1-4
Fumble	1	0
Penalties	5-40	8-62
Turnovers	1	1
Missed Tackles	5	4
Dropped Passes	1	1
Bad Passes	2	2
Passes 25+	0	2
Runs 10+	0	0
Blitzes	4	20
Challenges	1-1	0-0
Time	35:02	24:58
Thrd Down	9-19	6-15
Fourth Down	0-2	2-2
Red Att/Td/Fg	1/1/0	3/3/0
Net Offense	316	288



9-8-0

**Cowtown****14****MVP****Arian Foster****31****Aurora**

16-1-0

**TEAM LEADERS**

Passing	Cmp	Att	Yds	TD
Flacco	22	39	215	1
Rushing	Car	Yds	Avg	TD
Gurley	13	60	4.6	0
Receiving	Rec	Yds	Avg	TD
Evans	8	102	12.8	0

Team	1	2	3	4	OT	Total
Cowtown	0	14	0	0	-	14
Aurora	14	0	10	7	-	31

**Play of the Game**

With Aurora leading 17-14 early in the 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter, facing 1<sup>st</sup> & goal at the Cowtown 5, running back **Arian Foster** bashed through the line for a TD to give the 'Stangs a 10-point lead.

**TEAM LEADERS**

Passing	Cmp	Att	Yds	TD
Ryan	20	34	234	2
Rushing	Car	Yds	Avg	TD
Foster	34	161	4.7	2
Receiving	Rec	Yds	Avg	TD
Boldin	5	81	16.2	1

**KEYS TO THE GAME**

- 11 missed tackles
- No pass rush pressure
- 0 for 3 on 4<sup>th</sup> downs
- Failed trick play on 4<sup>th</sup> down in own end

## MUSTANGS TRAMPLE 'HEK' OUT OF CORN KINGS!

### FOSTER CARRIES AURORA TO SEMIS

**KEYS TO THE GAME**

- Blitz got through
- Arian Foster's 16 1<sup>st</sup> downs (13 run, 3 pass)
- 35:40 time of possession
- 3 of 3 on 4<sup>th</sup> downs

**SUMMARY:** The Mustangs looked to make it four straight playoff wins while the wildcard Corn Kings hoped to build on a close loss to Aurora in the regular season and pull off a big upset. The conditions for an upset appeared early when **Ronald Darby** intercepted **Matt Ryan** four plays into Aurora's opening drive, but a three-and-out by the Cowtown offence put the ball back in Ryan's hands with no damage done. On their second try the Mustangs were flawless, finding the end zone on a 25-yard TD pass to **Anquan Boldin** to cap an 84-yard drive. A **Trent Cole** sack pushed Cowtown into 3<sup>rd</sup> & 20 on their next series then **Earl Thomas** picked off a deep pass intended for **Mike Evans**, putting the ball at the 18. Aurora took advantage of the short field with a 6-yard TD pass to **Heath Miller** to make it 14-0. The Corn Kings crossed mid-field on their next series but were forced to punt on 4<sup>th</sup> & 10 at the Aurora 42. Signs of an impending Aurora rout appeared on the ensuing drive as the Mustangs drove from their own 7 yard line, riding a 24-yard run by **Arian Foster** and a 25-yard slant to Boldin to penetrate the Cowtown red zone. But Ryan threw into double coverage and **Terence Newman** picked him off in the end zone to end the threat and turn the momentum. A 31-yard pass to **Steve Smith Sr** helped to set up Cowtown's first score: a 13-yard check down in the end zone from **Joe Flacco** to **Cecil Shorts III**. Then on the 1<sup>st</sup> play of Aurora's ensuing drive, **Justin Smith** forced a fumble by Foster that **Marcell Dareus** recovered at the Aurora 25. Four plays later, a Flacco scramble into the end zone from 1 yard out tied the game at 14. Cowtown got the ball to start the 2<sup>nd</sup> half and came up 1-yard short of a 1<sup>st</sup> down at their 27. But instead of punting, **Johnny Hekker** attempted a pass that fell incomplete. Aurora took over at that spot and rode the legs of Foster to an easy go-ahead field goal. The momentum had turned back in the Mustangs favour. Cowtown went three-and-out on their next series and the Mustangs drove 71 yards, most of those on the ground, to a 5-yard TD run by Foster to make it 24-14. Another three-and-out for the visitors followed by another grueling Aurora drive for a TD made it 31-14 and ate up half the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter. Two more Cowtown drives came up empty and the Mustangs ground out the clock for the win.

**QUOTES:** "We never take any team for granted. We expected a tough fight and we got one. Nobody should be misled by the score; this was not an easy victory. That gamble they made took guts. If they make it, maybe it's a different outcome," – Aurora Coach, **Rich Liotta**.

"I felt we could make something happen if we made that first down. Everyone is going to second guess it since it didn't work out. I get why some people might be mad about it. It felt like a good idea at the time. I take full responsibility," – Cowtown Coach, **Jim Coghlin**.

**ANGRY FAN****titter****HAPPY FAN****Corn Stalker @cornstalker**

Why why why why? Why do they keep making the playoffs and LOSING?



**James Duthie @efljamesduthie**  
The Machine is in Motion!





# Cowtown 14 Aurora 31



	1	2	3	4	F
Cowtown	0	14	0	0	14
Aurora	14	0	10	7	31

## Scoring

1	6:20	Aurora	TD	Ryan 25 pass to Boldin (Folk) (11-84-5:51)	0-7
1	4:46	Aurora	TD	Ryan 6 pass to Miller (Folk) (5-18-0:26)	0-14
2	4:26	Cowtown	TD	Flacco 13 pass to Shorts III (Novak) (9-80-3:54)	7-14
2	2:43	Cowtown	TD	Flacco 1 run (Novak) (4-25-1:34)	14-14
3	7:12	Aurora	FG	Folk 33 (10-12-5:21)	14-17
3	0:58	Aurora	TD	Foster 5 run (Folk) (8-71-5:09)	14-24
4	7:16	Aurora	TD	Foster 3 run (Folk) (15-80-7:38)	14-31

## Player Stats

Passing	Att	Cmp	Yds	25	In	Td	Sk	Rate
Flacco	39	22	215	1	2	1	5	59.2
Hekker	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	39.6
	40	22	215	1	2	1	5	67.8

Rushing	Att	Yds	Avg	FD	10	Lg	Td
Gurley	13	60	4.6	2	0	8	0
Flacco	1	1	1.0	1	0	1	1
	14	61	4.4	3	0	8	1

Receiving	No	Dp	Att	Yds	Avg	FD	25	Lg	Td
Evans	8	1	15	102	12.8	5	0	17	0
Smith Sr	7	0	9	88	12.6	3	1	31	0
Gurley	4	0	6	9	2.3	0	0	7	0
Shorts III	2	0	4	18	9.0	1	0	13	1
Thomas J	1	0	4	-2	-2.0	0	0	0	0
Kerley	0	0	1	0	0.0	0	0	0	0
	22	1	40	215	9.8	9	1	31	1

Fumbles	No	Rec	Td
Dareus	0	1	0
	0	1	0

Kick Returns	No	Yds	Avg	Lg	Td
Thielen	4	35	8.8	13	0
Jones	1	19	19.0	19	0
Paul	1	10	10.0	10	0
	6	64	10.7	19	0

Punt Returns	No	Fc	Yds	Avg	Lg	Td
	0	0	0	0.0	0	0

Kicking	FG	Lg	XP	Pts
Novak	0-0	0	2-2	2

Punting	No	Yds	Avg	Tb	20	Bk	Lg
Hekker	4	184	46.0	0	2	0	54

Passing	Att	Cmp	Yds	25	In	Td	Sk	Rate
Ryan	34	20	234	2	2	2	0	74.9
	34	20	234	2	2	2	0	74.9

Rushing	Att	Yds	Avg	FD	10	Lg	Td
Foster	34	161	4.7	13	4	24	2
Ryan	6	31	5.2	2	2	15	0
Arts-Payne	3	6	2.0	0	0	5	0
Thomas P	1	2	2.0	0	0	2	0
	44	200	4.5	15	6	24	2

Receiving	No	Dp	Att	Yds	Avg	FD	25	Lg	Td
Boldin	5	0	10	81	16.2	4	2	25	1
Foster	4	0	6	41	10.3	3	0	13	0
Colek	4	0	4	34	8.5	2	0	11	0
Miller	3	0	4	35	11.7	2	0	15	1
Edelman	3	0	5	28	9.3	1	0	12	0
Holmes	1	1	5	15	15.0	0	0	15	0
	20	1	34	234	11.7	12	2	25	2

Fumbles	No	Rec	Td
Foster	1	0	0
	1	0	0

Kick Returns	No	Yds	Avg	Lg	Td
Polk	2	41	20.5	27	0
Mariani	1	30	30.0	30	0
	3	71	23.7	30	0

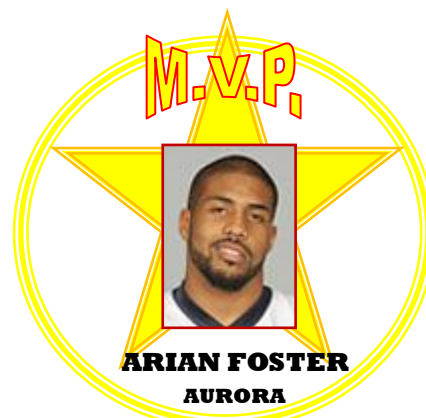
Punt Returns	No	Fc	Yds	Avg	Lg	Td
Edelman	2	0	11	5.5	9	0
	2	0	11	5.5	9	0

Kicking	FG	Lg	XP	Pts
Folk	1-1	33	4-4	7

Punting	No	Yds	Avg	Tb	20	Bk	Lg
Koch	2	94	47.0	2	0	0	51

Defense	Tkl	Sk	Def	Stf	Hur	FF	Int
Misi	11	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Quin	7	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
McLeod	6	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Griffin	6	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Flowers	5	0	1	1	0	0	0-0
Harris	5	0	0	1	0	0	0-0
Smith	4	0	0	0	2	1	0-0
Crick	4	0	2	0	0	0	0-0
Kerrigan	4	0	0	1	0	0	0-0
Dareus	4	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Darby	2	0	3	0	0	0	1-3
Sunsari	2	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Moats	2	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Newman	1	0	0	0	0	0	1-0
Burley	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Werner	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Gresham	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Cason	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
	67	0	6	3	2	1	2-3

Defense	Tkl	Sk	Def	Stf	Hur	FF	Int
Thomas E	7	0	1	0	0	0	1-12
Norman	6	0	1	0	0	0	1-0
Cole	5	2	0	0	0	0	0-0
Peterson	4	0	1	0	0	0	0-0
Jenkins	4	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Carrie	4	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Dansby	3	1	0	0	2	0	0-0
Weddle	3	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Watt	2	2	1	0	0	0	0-0
Starks	2	0	0	0	1	0	0-0
Avril	2	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Jackson	2	0	0	1	0	0	0-0
Boydin	2	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Davis	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Young	0	0	0	0	1	0	0-0
	47	5	4	1	4	0	2-12



202 total yards (161 rush, 41 pass)  
and 2 TDs. Carried the offence.

	Cowtown	Aurora
First Downs	13	29
Rushes	14-61	44-200
Passes	40-22-215	34-20-234
Sacked	5-43	0-0
Fumble	0	1
Penalties	5-40	6-51
Turnovers	2	3
Missed Tackles	11	4
Dropped Passes	1	1
Bad Passes	4	1
Passes 25+	1	2
Runs 10+	0	6
Blitzes	18	40
Time	24:20	35:40
Third Down	7-17	7-13
Fourth Down	0-3	3-3
Red Att/Td/Fg	2/2/0	5/3/1
Net Offense	233	434



11-5-0

Twin Cities

17

MVP

Lamar Miller

31

Charleswood

13-3-0



## TEAM LEADERS

Passing	Cmp	Att	Yds	TD
Cutler	21	36	231	2
Rushing	Car	Yds	Avg	TD
Gordon	13	63	4.8	0
Receiving	Rec	Yds	Avg	TD
Brown	6	126	21.0	1

Team	1	2	3	4	OT	Total
Twin Cities	3	7	7	0	-	17
Charleswood	7	10	0	14	-	31

## Play of the Game

Leading 10-3 in the 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter, facing 2<sup>nd</sup> & 6, **Peyton Manning** threw a short curl into tight man coverage. **Jason Witten** evaded the tackle and hugged the sideline for a 35-yard TD.

## TEAM LEADERS

Passing	Cmp	Att	Yds	TD
Manning	19	27	264	1
Rushing	Car	Yds	Avg	TD
Miller	19	129	6.8	3
Receiving	Rec	Yds	Avg	TD
Johnson	7	96	13.7	0



## KEYS TO THE GAME

- Penalized 13 times for 101 yards
- Only 1 offensive play over 25 yards

## PATS RUN AWAY IN 4<sup>TH</sup>!

### LAMAR MILLER FINISHES TD HAT TRICK IN FINAL FRAME



## KEYS TO THE GAME

- 7 "Big Holes" created by offensive linemen
- 100% Red Zone TD efficiency

**SUMMARY:** In the temperature-controlled comfort of Patriot Place, Charleswood faced the challenge of defeating the Triumph for the third straight time while the Triumph looked to avoid a season sweep and advance to the next round. The first two series of the game yielded no points for either team but provided great field position for the Pats at the Triumph 38. They took advantage with a run-focused drive for a TD on a 10-yard run by **Lamar Miller**. After an exchange of field goals and a backwards drive by the Triumph, the Pats again took advantage of a short field when **Jason Witten** evaded tight coverage and slipped down the sideline for a 35-yard catch-and-run TD to make it 17-3. The Triumph were quick to answer, with **Jay Cutler** finding **Antonio Brown** wide open deep for a 61-yard TD pass to pull within one score. The Triumph caught a break on the ensuing Pats' possession when **Ziggy Ansah** pounced on an **Andre Johnson** fumble at the Pats' 36 yard line. But a holding penalty and a pass for negative yardage to **Shane Vereen** pushed them out of field goal range. On the Pats' 1<sup>st</sup> possession of the 2<sup>nd</sup> half a personal foul on **Corey Linsley** and a sack of **Peyton Manning** by **Jerry Hughes** had them soon punting from their own end zone. The Triumph took over at their 44 and were carried into striking distance by the 46 all-purpose yards of running back **Melvin Gordon** before they tied the game on a 6-yard TD pass to **Kendall Wright**. The Pats did not flinch; they ran twice off tackle with Miller for 22 yards, prompting the Triumph to add an extra down lineman. Witten took advantage of the hole in the second level to turn a short hitch into a 41-yard gain to the 9, setting up a Miller TD run from 3 yards out to give the home team back the lead. A holding penalty on **Charles Clay** set the Triumph back on their next possession and they were forced to punt. Starting at their 36, the Pats got rolling with a 32-yard run off tackle by Miller followed by an 11-yard slant to Johnson to breach the red zone. Minutes later Miller was crossing the goal line from 6 yards out to make it 31-17, Charleswood, with 8:16 remaining. The Triumph got two more decent opportunities, crossing into Charleswood territory both times but twice failing to keep the drives alive on 4<sup>th</sup> down. The Pats completed the sweep and advanced to the PAC final.

**QUOTES:** "We're happy to get this one by us, but we're not finished yet, not by a long shot. We have lots of work to do before I sit down to enjoy a slice of Papa John's and a can of Budweiser," – Charleswood QB, **Peyton Manning**.

"First off I would like to congratulate our opponents for a great season and a heck of a football game. They were the better team today. Actually they've been the better team each time we've faced them. You know what, f\*&k them, I hope they lose next week!" – TC coach, **Guy Williams**.

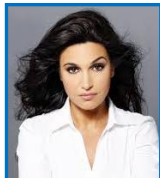


## ANGRY FAN



titter

## HAPPY FAN

**Molly** @Mollyqerim

At least the Triumph still have me around!

**Charlie Wood** @Cwoodbannersun

Peyton is playing like this is his final year. No longer fancy, just getting the job done.





# Twin Cities 17 Charleswood 31



	1	2	3	4	F
Twin Cities	3	7	7	0	17
Charleswood	7	10	0	14	31

## Scoring

1	6:46	Charleswood	TD	Miller 10 run (Succop) (7-38-3:31)	0-7
1	2:54	Twin Cities	FG	Gostkowski 42 (8-36-3:46)	3-7
2	14:02	Charleswood	FG	Succop 48 (9-62-3:22)	3-10
2	11:22	Charleswood	TD	Manning 35 pass to Witten (Succop) (2-39-0:49)	3-17
2	10:13	Twin Cities	TD	Cutler 61 pass to Brown (Gostkowski) (3-70-1:04)	10-17
3	2:21	Twin Cities	TD	Cutler 6 pass to Wright (Gostkowski) (12-56-6:38)	17-17
4	14:57	Charleswood	TD	Miller 3 run (Succop) (5-72-2:24)	17-24
4	8:16	Charleswood	TD	Miller 6 run (Succop) (9-64-5:20)	17-31

## Player Stats

Passing	Att	Cmp	Yds	25	In	Td	Sk	Rate
Cutler	36	21	231	1	0	2	1	95.9
	36	21	231	1	0	2	1	95.9

Rushing	Att	Yds	Avg	FD	10	Lg	Td
Gordon	13	63	4.8	2	2	16	0
Cutler	4	45	11.3	2	2	18	0
Wright	1	14	14.0	0	1	14	0
Vereen	4	12	3.0	0	0	6	0
	22	134	6.1	4	5	18	0

Receiving	No	Dp	Att	Yds	Avg	FD	25	Lg	Td
Brown	6	0	12	126	21.0	4	1	61	1
Vereen	5	1	6	18	3.6	2	0	10	0
Jackson	3	0	8	31	10.3	2	0	18	0
Gordon	3	0	3	20	6.7	1	0	11	0
Wright	2	0	4	21	10.5	2	0	15	1
Allen D	1	0	1	9	9.0	0	0	9	0
Clay	1	0	2	6	6.0	0	0	6	0
	21	1	36	231	11.0	11	1	61	2

Fumbles	No	Rec	Td
Cutler	1	0	0
Gordon	1	0	0
Clay	0	2	0
Ansah	0	1	0
	2	3	0

Kick Returns	No	Yds	Avg	Lg	Td
Wheaton	2	53	26.5	30	0
	2	53	26.5	30	0

Punt Returns	No	Pc	Yds	Avg	Lg	Td
Brown	1	1	4	4.0	4	0
	1	1	4	4.0	4	0

Kicking	FG	Lg	XP	Pts
Gostkowski	1-1	42	2-2	5

Punting	No	Yds	Avg	Tb	20	Bk	Lg
Ryan	5	211	42.2	0	1	0	48

Passing	Att	Cmp	Yds	25	In	Td	Sk	Rate
Manning	27	19	264	3	0	1	5	113.8
	27	19	264	3	0	1	5	113.8

Rushing	Att	Yds	Avg	FD	10	Lg	Td
Miller	19	129	6.8	6	4	32	3
Johnson D	6	9	1.5	0	0	5	0
Manning	4	2	0.5	0	0	5	0
	29	140	4.8	6	4	32	3

Receiving	No	Dp	Att	Yds	Avg	FD	25	Lg	Td
Johnson A	7	1	9	96	13.7	6	1	42	0
Watkins	5	0	6	43	8.6	2	0	12	0
Miller	3	1	4	29	9.7	1	0	13	0
Witten	3	0	5	83	27.7	2	2	41	1
Bryant	1	0	2	13	13.0	0	0	13	0
Kuhn	0	0	1	0	0.0	0	0	0	0
	19	2	37	264	13.9	11	3	42	1

Fumbles	No	Rec	Td
Manning	1	1	0
Johnson A	1	0	0
	2	1	0

Kick Returns	No	Yds	Avg	Lg	Td
Geise	3	77	25.7	33	0
	3	77	25.7	33	0

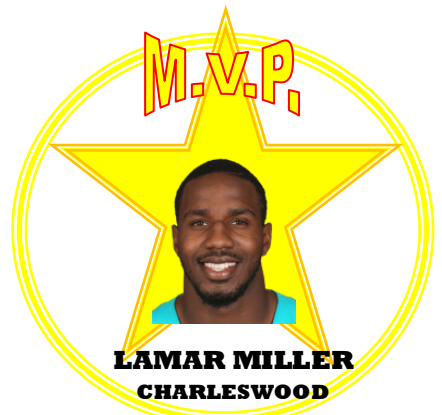
Punt Returns	No	Pc	Yds	Avg	Lg	Td
Marlin	4	0	39	9.8	12	0
	4	0	39	9.8	12	0

Kicking	FG	Lg	XP	Pts
Succop	1-1	48	4-4	7

Punting	No	Yds	Avg	Tb	20	Bk	Lg
Huber	4	183	45.8	0	2	0	52

Defense	Tkl	Sk	Def	Str	Hur	FF	Int
Hughes	10	2	0	2	0	1	0-0
Slay	10	0	1	0	0	0	0-0
Melton	6	1	0	0	0	0	0-0
Roby	5	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Casey	4	2	1	0	1	0	0-0
Anthony	3	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Ansah	2	0	0	1	1	0	0-0
Worlds	2	0	0	0	0	1	0-0
Harris Jr.	2	0	1	0	0	0	0-0
Williams	2	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Searcy	2	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Bradham	2	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Maxwell	2	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Allen N	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Crawford	1	0	0	1	0	0	0-0
Cooper	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Gholston	1	0	0	1	0	0	0-0
Smith	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
	57	5	3	5	2	2	0-0

Defense	Tkl	Sk	Def	Str	Hur	FF	Int
David	13	0	0	2	0	0	0-0
Moseley C	5	1	1	0	2	0	0-0
Talb	5	0	0	0	0	1	0-0
Heyward	4	0	1	0	1	1	0-0
Collins	4	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Powers	4	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Abdullah	3	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Clinton-Dix	2	0	1	0	0	0	0-0
Williams T	2	0	1	0	0	0	0-0
Shelton	2	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Ford	2	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Trufant	1	0	3	0	0	0	0-0
Lawrence	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Hankins	0	0	0	0	1	0	0-0
Moseley C	0	0	0	0	1	0	0-0
	48	1	7	2	6	2	0-0



19 Carries, 129 yards, 3 TDs. Big 2<sup>nd</sup> half carried Pats to game-winning TD

	Twin Cities	Charleswood
First Downs	16	19
Rushes	22-134	29-140
Passes	36-21-231	27-19-264
Sacked	1-11	5-45
Fumble	2	2
Penalties	13-103	7-51
Turnovers	0	1
Missed Tackles	4	9
Dropped Passes	1	2
Bad Passes	5	2
Passes 25+	1	3
Runs 10+	5	4
Blitzes	5	25
Time	27:52	32:08
Third Down	5-16	6-12
Fourth Down	1-3	0-1
Red Att/Td/Fg	2/1/0	3/3/0
Net Offense	354	359



12-4-1

Iowa City

34

MVP

Russell Wilson

20

Beaufort County



12-4-1

## TEAM LEADERS

Passing	Cmp	Att	Yds	TD
Wilson	12	21	136	1
Rushing	Car	Yds	Avg	TD
Wilson	9	89	9.9	0
Receiving	Rec	Yds	Avg	TD
Randle	3	37	12.3	0

Team	1	2	3	4	OT	Total
Iowa City	7	3	0	24	-	34
Beaufort County	0	6	14	0	-	20

## Play of the Game

Trailing 20-17 in the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter, Cubs CB **Casey Hayward** stepped in front of a short pass from **RGIII** and picked it off, returning it for a TD for the game-winning score.

## TEAM LEADERS

Passing	Cmp	Att	Yds	TD
RGIII	15	26	186	1
Rushing	Car	Yds	Avg	TD
Stewart	14	67	4.8	1
Receiving	Rec	Yds	Avg	TD
Cobb	4	68	17.0	1



## KEYS TO THE GAME

- Casey Hayward PD & pick-six in 4<sup>th</sup> quarter
- Offensive line
- 8 runs of 10+ yards

## CUBS PICK APART RAVENS!

### 4<sup>TH</sup> QUARTER INTS TURN TIDE



## KEYS TO THE GAME

- RGIII's back-to-back interceptions
- 9 missed tackles
- 5 sacks allowed

**SUMMARY:** On a beautiful day in Charlotte the Ravens put their playoff future in the hands of **RGIII** while the Cubs aimed to finally win a game against their West Division nemesis. It started well for the Cubs, with **Jason Pierre-Paul** sacking **RGIII** on his first drop back to help force a first-series punt then **Russell Wilson** scrambling for 21 yards to key a 75-yard counter-drive for 7 points on a 9-yard TD pass to **Coby Fleener**. The Ravens drove back 58 yards, aided by 39-yards rushing by **Jonathan Stewart**, but settled for a 40-yard **Cody Parkey** FG after a 3<sup>rd</sup> down sack by **Chris Borland**. The Cubs returned fire with Wilson scrambling and passing from the Cubs 20 to the Ravens' 7, but **Charles Johnson** sacked Wilson on 3<sup>rd</sup> down to force a **Greg Zuerlein** FG from 30 yards, making it 10-3, Cubs. Pierre-Paul's second sack of the day squelched another Beaufort drive but the Ravens rallied on the Cubs' ensuing possession when **Brent Grimes** stripped the ball from receiver **Mike Wallace** and Beaufort recovered at their 45. **DeAndre Hopkins** caught a 32-yard deep ball on the next play, bringing the Ravens to the Cubs' 7 yard line, but the Iowa goal line defence held and the Ravens ended the 1<sup>st</sup> half with a chip shot FG to draw within 4 points. **Clay Matthews** blindsided Wilson on the opening drive of the 2<sup>nd</sup> half to help force a quick punt and the Ravens' offence responded with a 46-yard TD pass to **Randall Cobb**, putting them in front for the first time, 13-10. Matthews sacked Wilson again on the next Cubs series and **Gerald McCoy** blocked the punt by **Bryan Anger** at the Cubs' 21, setting up a 3-yard TD run by Stewart. The Ravens now led 20-10 and were on the move to start the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter when an errant deep pass from **RGIII** was intercepted by **Malcolm Jenkins** and returned 52 yards to the Beaufort 22. Two plays later, **Jeremy Hill** was busting off tackle for a 19-yard TD run. On the Ravens next play from scrimmage, Griffin threw a short slant into the arms of corner **Casey Hayward** who turned it into a 25-yard pick-six. In the span of one minute, the Cubs had gone from down by 10 to up by 4, leading 24-20. The Ravens' offence never got back on track. Wilson scrambled for 32 yards to set up a 1-yard TD run by **Jerick McKinnon** and Zuerlein rounded out a 24-point 4<sup>th</sup> quarter with a FG to shock the home crowd and advance.

**QUOTES:** "I know you all think I'm crazy, but this is what happens when a team BELIEVES in itself, truly believes! Everyone was down on us except us. We knew we would come back and beat this team. This is a growth game for us!" – Iowa City Coach, **Deron Redding**.

"I don't see how I could have made a different decision. Robert led the league in passer rating this year. He gave us a post-season win last year. He practiced well all week. Except for those two interceptions that cost us the game, he played well, I think," – Ravens Coach, **Neil Shannon**.



HAPPY FAN



titter

ANGRY FAN



**Sparky McGillicuddy** @SparkyM  
Moments of inspiration sparkle in the Cubs' dark moments. This time it was the spark of the defence that lit the flame of victory.



**General Supernaw** @SpOpReDead  
This was caused by an unforgiveable breakdown of discipline under fire. The QB should be court-martialled.





# Iowa City 34 Beaufort County 20



	1	2	3	4	F
Iowa City	7	3	0	24	34
Beaufort County	0	6	14	0	20

## Scoring

1	7:26	Iowa City	TD	Wilson 9 pass to Fleener (Zuerlein) (9-75-5:18)	7-0
2	14:57	Beaufort Count	FG	Parkey 40 (13-58-7:26)	7-3
2	7:28	Iowa City	FG	Zuerlein 30 (13-58-7:24)	10-3
2	0:24	Beaufort Count	FG	Parkey 22 (8-51-3:58)	10-6
3	9:30	Beaufort Count	TD	Griffin III 46 pass to Cobb (Parkey) (4-74-2:19)	10-13
3	4:10	Beaufort Count	TD	Stewart 3 run (Parkey) (8-21-3:06)	10-20
4	13:17	Iowa City	TD	Hill 19 run (Zuerlein) (2-22-0:49)	17-20
4	13:02	Iowa City	TD	Hayward 25 interception return (Zuerlein)	24-20
4	4:02	Iowa City	TD	McKinnon 1 run (Zuerlein) (10-73-5:44)	31-20
4	0:48	Iowa City	FG	Zuerlein 33 (6-14-1:32)	34-20

## Player Stats

Passing	Att	Cmp	Yds	25	In	Td	Sk	Rate
Wilson	21	12	136	1	0	1	3	92.6
	21	12	136	1	0	1	3	92.6

Passing	Att	Cmp	Yds	25	In	Td	Sk	Rate
Griffin III	26	15	186	2	2	1	5	60.7
	26	15	186	2	2	1	5	60.7

Rushing	Att	Yds	Avg	FD	10	Lg	Td
Wilson	9	89	9.9	4	3	32	0
Hill	7	49	7.0	3	2	19	1
McKinnon	13	48	3.7	3	1	14	1
Kappemick	1	10	10.0	0	1	10	0
Austin	1	10	10.0	1	1	10	0
Sproles	1	5	5.0	1	0	5	0
Develin	1	1	1.0	0	0	1	0
	32	212	6.6	12	8	32	2

Rushing	Att	Yds	Avg	FD	10	Lg	Td
Stewart	14	67	4.8	5	4	13	1
Griffin III	5	32	6.4	2	1	14	0
Williams,K	2	10	5.0	0	0	7	0
	21	109	5.2	7	5	14	1

Receiving	No	Lg	Att	Yds	Avg	FD	25	Lg	Td
Randee	3	0	4	37	12.3	3	0	15	0
Wallace	3	0	3	31	10.3	2	0	12	0
LaFell	3	0	4	24	6.0	1	0	11	0
Fleener	1	0	3	9	9.0	1	0	9	1
Austin	1	0	1	9	9.0	0	0	9	0
Quick	1	0	2	26	26.0	1	1	26	0
Sproles	0	0	3	0	0.0	0	0	0	0
Hill	0	0	1	0	0.0	0	0	0	0
	13	0	21	136	11.3	9	1	26	1

Receiving	No	Lg	Att	Yds	Avg	FD	25	Lg	Td
Gronkowski	4	0	4	30	7.5	2	0	10	0
Cobb	4	1	8	68	17.0	3	1	45	1
Hopkins	4	0	7	65	16.3	2	1	32	0
Stewart	2	0	4	12	6.0	0	0	8	0
Jeffery	1	0	2	11	11.0	0	0	11	0
Develin	0	1	1	0	0.0	0	0	0	0
	15	2	26	186	12.4	7	2	46	1

Fumbles	No	Rec	Td
Wallace	1	0	0
Ogden	0	1	0
	1	1	0

Fumbles	No	Rec	Td
Griffin III	1	1	0
Cobb	1	0	0
Patton	1	0	0
Johnson	0	1	0
Smith	0	1	0
	3	3	0

Kick Returns	No	Yds	Avg	Lg	Td
Locant	1	22	22.0	22	0
	1	22	22.0	22	0

Kick Returns	No	Yds	Avg	Lg	Td
Patton	4	64	21.0	25	0
	4	64	21.0	25	0

Punt Returns	No	Fc	Yds	Avg	Lg	Td
Sproles	1	1	9	9.0	9	0
	1	1	9	9.0	9	0

Punt Returns	No	Fc	Yds	Avg	Lg	Td
Cobb	0	1	0	0.0	0	0
	0	1	0	0.0	0	0

Kicking	FG	Lg	XP	Pts
Zuerlein	2-2	33	4-4	10

Kicking	FG	Lg	XP	Pts
Parkey	2-2	40	2-2	8

Punting	No	Yds	Avg	Tb	20	Bk	Lg
Angel	2	104	52.0	1	0	1	57

Punting	No	Yds	Avg	Tb	20	Bk	Lg
Mashay	3	134	44.7	0	0	0	48

Defense	Tkl	Sk	Def	Stt	Hur	FF	Int
Plema-Paul	6	3	0	1	0	0	0-0
Mingo	5	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Gimore	4	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Ogden	4	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Jenkins	3	0	1	0	0	0	1-52
Jones	3	0	1	0	0	0	0-0
Car	3	0	0	0	1	0	0-0
Graham	3	0	1	0	0	0	0-0
Williams,M	2	1	0	0	1	0	0-0
Borland	2	1	0	0	0	1	0-0
Rhodes	2	0	0	0	0	1	0-0
Jacob	2	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Hayward	1	0	3	0	0	0	1-25
Watkins	1	0	0	0	0	1	0-0
Richardson	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Smith,L	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Wilkinson	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Deal	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
	45	5	6	1	3	3	2-77

Defense	Tkl	Sk	Def	Stt	Hur	FF	Int
Matthews	7	2	0	1	0	0	0-0
Johnson	6	1	0	0	0	0	0-0
Grimes	6	0	2	0	0	1	0-0
Burkitt	5	0	2	0	0	0	0-0
Smith	5	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Bryant	4	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Rolle	3	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Jenkins	3	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Revis	2	0	1	0	0	0	0-0
Williams,B	2	0	0	0	1	0	0-0
Elam	2	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
McCoy	1	0	0	0	3	0	0-0
Ferguson	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Ryan	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Brinkley	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
	49	3	5	1	4	1	0-0



136 yards passing, 1 TD, 89 yards rushing – he was the heart of the 'O.'

	Iowa City	Beaufort County
First Downs	20	16
Rushes	33-212	21-109
Passes	21-12-136	26-15-186
Sacked	3-25	5-26
Fumble	1	3
Penalties	5-35	3-26
Turnovers	1	3
Missed Tackles	2	9
Dropped Passes	0	2
Bad Passes	2	1
Passes 25+	1	2
Runs 10+	8	5
Blitzes	6	23
Time	30:59	29:01
Third Down	4-9	4-10
Fourth Down	0-0	0-1
Red Att/Td/Fg	5/3/2	5/1/2
Net Offense	323	269



# AROUND THE



## With Spats McChad

NEW YORK – If you were surprised by the final outcomes in this year’s quarter final round you shouldn’t be. The match-ups were more of a foregone conclusion than last year’s quartet of stinkers. Many analysts were predicting at least one, possibly two big upsets in the first round that would have set up coronations in the semi-final round for the favourites who survived. Those prognosticators were likely fooled by Gwinnett’s early ambush of the slumbering Thunder Lizards in Week Three and the flash-in-the-pan success of Ravens’ starter RGIII in limited regular season action. Instead, none of the underdogs had it in them to wriggle out from underneath the crushing weight of superior talent and score a killing blow to the temple with their proverbial slingshot. David, as so often happens outside of Bible stories, fell four times to variously sized Goliaths.

I, for one, am not mourning the culling of the weakest teams from the playoff herd. I don’t live in any of the losing cities and, until New York gets a franchise, I don’t have a steady rooting interest in any EFL team. I am one of the growing number of “Bachelor Fans,” unattached to any one team, except the team with my most important fantasy players on it. When not cheering for those players, I cheer for football itself. And football will be well-served by the two potentially classic Conference Championships match-ups in this year’s semi-final round.

Before we get to those big games, let’s take a look back at the key moments in the quarter final round that separated the men from the boys.

### ONE ‘HEK’ OF A BAD CALL

For the Corn Kings to pull off an upset of the mighty Mustangs in Aurora they needed to play their best football and get a couple of breaks as well. Even the most diehard and dimwitted of the Cowtown faithful – the type of callers who flood COW-550 AM’s ‘Cock-a-Doodle-Do’ morning show to make excuses for **Joe Flacco** interceptions – acknowledged by a 58% to 42% margin in the station Internet poll that it was going to be a “tough test for our boys” as opposed to a “tie ‘em up Mustang rodeo.”

Observers throughout the rest of the continent saw things more realistically: the vast majority believed it would take a miracle for Cowtown to knock off the defending champs. The Corn Kings had been erratic – capable of impressive highs but equally susceptible to wretched lows – and they were on the road against a confident powerhouse playing its best football of the year. This game had the potential to be one of the worst blowouts in playoff history. So it never entered anybody’s mind that pundits and fans would later be debating a controversial play call by the conservative Cowtown coach and suggesting that it might have cost his team the game.

Those few who had called a Cowtown upset – among them, “upset fetishist” **Sperl Sponefritter** of Sperl’s *World of Sports* and Joe Flacco’s mother, Karen – concocted scenarios that involved an early Mustangs turnover to justify their argument. That view looked almost prophetic when rookie cornerback **Ronald Darby** picked off **Matt Ryan** on the Mustangs’ opening drive. But the case for an upset took an immediate hit when the Corn King offence went three-and-out.

After that false start, the Mustangs broke into a trot with a two-tight end set, a formation that serves as the team’s de facto “basic” offence. They steadily moved all the way from their 16 to the Cowtown 25, mixing runs in with short passes. The Corn Kings finally tightened the coverage and paid an immediate price when **Anquan Boldin** found a hole in the middle of the zone and took a hitch pass 25 yards for the opening score. It was going to be that kind of day on defence for the visitors: making the adjustment at the exact wrong time.

The Corn Kings’ offence continued to go backwards, with **Trent Cole** blowing by tight end **Julius Thomas** to sack Flacco for a 10-yard loss. On 3<sup>rd</sup> and 20, Flacco attempted a deep pass that **Earl Thomas** picked off and returned 12 yards to the Cowtown 18 yards line. Ryan made short work of that distance, finishing off a quick drive with a 6-yard check down to **Heath Miller** in the end zone. Leading 14-0, the Mustangs were now at a full gallop and looking to pull away.

Cowtown got the ball for a third time and managed to string together three 1<sup>st</sup> downs before punting. It looked as if the effort might be the best the offence could do against a fired up Aurora defence that was bending back and pushing around the front five of the Corn Kings on almost every snap. On the other side, the Mustangs’ offence was looking unstoppable as it reapplied its formula of running in the two-tight end set to soften up the defence then switching to a spread formation to finish it off. In 10 plays it had moved from the Aurora 7 to the Cowtown 11 and had overcome a holding penalty on the way. They went for the jugular, throwing to Boldin in the outside corner of the end zone. But the Corn Kings had double-covered Ryan’s



favourite target. Darby tipped the pass away and it ricocheted into the arms of a diving **Terence Newman** for an interception. That play would turn out to be a turning point in the game. *The* turning point, however, was yet to come.

The Corn Kings moved the ball with vigor on their ensuing possession. The offensive line held up against a steady blitz and **Steve Smith Sr.** blew by his defender to turn a short slant into a 31-yard pass play to reach the Aurora red zone. On 3<sup>rd</sup> & 3 at the 13 the Mustangs rushed 6 but Flacco got good protection and found **Cecil Shorts III** open in the end zone for a touchdown. There was life again on the Corn King sideline and **Justin Smith** kept it going by forcing a fumble by **Arian Foster** on the Mustangs' next possession that was recovered by **Marcell Dareus** at the Aurora 25. The turnover led to another touchdown as Flacco dove for the pylon for a 1-yard score on a 1<sup>st</sup> and goal scramble. The Corn Kings were back even, the crowd was stunned and Aurora Coach, **Rich Liotta** could not help looking a little grim.

The Mustangs drove back into Cowtown territory, but failed to convert 4<sup>th</sup> & 5 at the 39, giving the ball back to Cowtown with enough time for a 'Hail Mary' interception to end the 1<sup>st</sup> half. Although the game was tied, the body language on the opposing sidelines could not have been more dissimilar. The Corn Kings had a leap in their steps as they jogged toward the locker room while the Mustangs strode slowly and heavily as if they had lost. In a sense, they had – they had lost a 14-point lead and a chance to make it more. Giving up double-digit leads didn't happen very often, if ever, to the league's most dominating powerhouse. The feeling in the Aurora locker room must have been unfamiliar and a little bewildering.

The Corn Kings started with the ball in the second half. Flacco looked charged up as he slung a 3<sup>rd</sup> down pass through double-coverage to Smith Sr for 11 yards and a 1<sup>st</sup> down. But a late flag thrown by referee **Pete Morelli**, a full five seconds after the whistle, targeted right guard **Andy Levitre** for holding, negating the first down. Cowtown coach, **Jim Coghlin** was visibly livid on the sideline



as Morelli took the unusual step of explaining over the PA system why the *non-call* had been overturned: *"There was no legal block on the previous play. It was holding on number 67 of the offence. The penalty will be enforced from the previous line of scrimmage.....third down!"*

Replays show Levitre delivering a typical block to **Randy Starks** – his right hand slips under Starks' pads in the struggle but it is impossible to see if Levitre is grabbing the jersey underneath. It was a questionable call at best – arbitrary or actual game-fixing at worst. With flashes of the old NFL racing through my head, I found it suddenly difficult to take the game seriously. But subsequent events eliminated refereeing as a factor in the Aurora win. (The refereeing in the EFL is a topic of discussion for another column).

On 3<sup>rd</sup> & 12 Flacco dropped back and delivered another strike, this time to **Mike Evans**, but **Patrick Peterson** wrapped up the big Cowtown receiver at the 27 yard line, one yard short of the first down.

*"Damn, damn, damn, damn, damn!"* a staccato streak of damns flowed in undamn-like fashion from the mouth of Coach Coghlin, *"We have to keep this ball!"*

It was at that moment that Cowtown punter **Johnny Hekker** flashed a look at his coach. It was a mischievous look – the grinning conspiratorial raising of the eyebrows type of look one might give a friend before pulling off a prank.

"You want I should do my thing, coach?" Hekker asked as he jogged onto the field.

Hekker's "thing" was a fake punt pass that he had perfected last year in practice and had used to great effect in games. He was 1 of 2 this year, for 16 yards, and he never missed a chance to remind back-up quarterback **Jimmy Garoppolo** that he had more pass attempts than him this season.

The Devil, in the form of his punter, was

Cowtown coach **Jim Coghlin** winces in anguish after punter **Johnny Hekker** missed an open **Julius Thomas** on a 4<sup>th</sup> & 1 fake punt from the Cowtown 27 yard line. The Mustangs went on to kick the go-ahead field goal and eventually win the game. The call was considered by many to be the turning point in the game.



Jubilant Aurora fans, many visiting from Garland, Texas, show their appreciation for their team and coach as their team cruises to another playoff victory. This female fan, probably from Texas, apparently doesn't know that Canada doesn't have a President.

drowning out the Angel in Coach Coghlin's ear. The safe thing, the smart thing, would have been to punt and trust that his defence had another takeaway in them. But he wanted to keep the ball, damn it! *'If only we could keep this ball I know we are going to score,'* he might have been thinking in that fateful moment.

"Hey Johnny!" he yelled. His punter turned around and looked back. Coach Coghlin gave him a nod and a wink.

Hekker gave a fist-pump in approval. *"YES!"* he hissed under his breath.

The die was cast. And it came up snake eyes. If the Mustangs were fooled it was just for an instant. Hekker surveyed the field as the pass coverage kicked in quickly. He hesitated for a fraction of a second, as if unsure who to throw to, then fired off target in the direction of a stretching Thomas, the tight end. The Auroran crowd leapt to its feet and howled in a mix of elation and derision. *Who tries that on the Mustangs?* some of them may have been thinking.

*EFL Sounds of the Game*, had **JJ Watt** hooked up for the show. As he walked off the field he shook his head and said, "That takes big balls!"

....or a pea brain.

We will never know what would have happened had Hekker completed that pass. But we know with 100% certainty what happened after he did *not*. The Mustangs showed uncharacteristic conservatism on their next possession. Already in field goal range, they apparently did not wish to blow the opportunity. They ran Foster 6 straight times, slowly and incrementally pushing back the Cowtown line. Exerting extra effort to atone for his 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter fumble, Foster ran through keying linebacker **David Harris** to convert a 4<sup>th</sup> & 2 at the 6 yard line. But the drive finally ground to a halt at the 5, with just one pass attempted, and the Mustangs settled for a field goal.

When the Corn Kings got the ball back it was obvious that the offence had lost its swagger – or at least Thomas had. Twice Flacco dumped off to Thomas when his primary receivers were covered and both times the tight end did not come close to catching it. His arms seemed the length of hot dogs and his eyes were focused more on a hovering **Earl Thomas** than the ball.

With that three-and-out by the Cowtown offence, the Mustangs straightened up and relaxed. Still flustered from his punter's failed gambit and kicking himself for his role in allowing it to happen, Coach Coghlin seemed distracted on the sideline. He had no clue what plays the Mustangs were going to run and he guessed wrong on all but one of the eight plays in the 71-yard touchdown



drive that followed. A short cross to **Julian Edelman** for 8 yards and a medium hitch to **Brent Celek** for 11 were mere distractive window-dressing for a 15-yard scramble by Ryan and 32 hard yards by Foster on that drive that ended with the Aurora running back ploughing through the Cowtown line and into the end zone from 5 yards out. The team that had rained down death from above on its opponents all season had re-invented itself on the spot as a ground-and-pound machine.

With a more comfortable two-score advantage, the Mustangs' defence took center stage and laid siege to **Joe Flacco**. On the first play of their ensuing drive, Cole broke through on the blitz and stripped the ball from the Cowtown QB. But upon review the officials ruled that Flacco's arm had been going forward. The ruling simply delayed the inevitable. The Corn Kings went three-and-out, punted again, and gradually yielded another 80 yards and a touchdown to their opponent, with Foster doing the honours from 3 yards out. It was now 31-14 halfway through the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter and the writing was on the wall. No team in the league finishes off a game like Liotta's Mustangs do, and they did their "thing" with comparatively little effort, shutting down the visitors the rest of the way.

Coghlin was, of course, eviscerated for his rash gamble in the Cowtown and National Press. *'WHAT THE HEK?'* blared the headline on the Cowtown Plain Dealer. *'WILL HEKKER GAMBIT PUNT COWTOWN COACH?'* was the banner on the ESPN website. **Russ Flont** called it: *"the stupidest special teams fake in the history of football,"* while the usually staid **Peter Prince** of *Sports Illustrated* weighed in with an uncharacteristically disparaging line in his *'Monday Morning Quarterback'* column: "One has to wonder what Coghlin was thinking there, or even IF he was thinking."

Those few who liked or admired the call were drowned out in the ridicule and outrage of many. Coghlin took it like a man, answering all questions, even the ones that were asked many times, such as "would you call that play over again if you had the chance?" But, as Coghlin, himself, pointed out in his post-game press conference: *"missing that pass was not what lost us the game. It was a setback certainly, but there were plenty of other problems that combined to put us on the losing end. For one, the Mustangs are a great football team and they played like one."*

Interestingly, one of the quiet voices who thought it was a good call was Coghlin's opposite number, **Rich Liotta**. When asked about it post game, he admitted: *"He took a shot at the right time, I think. They had the momentum. Their punter completes that pass and they magnify it. I don't really want to think what might have happened had they caught us on our heels like that. It may have made no difference, or it may have made all the difference."*

I will not join the chorus condemning the Cowtown coach. The Corn Kings had almost no shot at winning that game, but, for a few brief moments, they had the mighty Mustangs doubting themselves.

### **WHEEL OF FORTUNE**

**RGIII** was named the starting quarterback for the Ravens for the first round of the post-season after apparently finishing 28 seconds ahead of **Shaun Hill** and 11 seconds ahead of **Bryce Petty** in an obstacle course set up by the Ravens' 'Coach Squad' to simulate the defence of the Iowa City Cubs. The candidates had five runs each and the lowest time total, after penalties, was the named the winner and starter for the game.

The contestants had to evade a rolling wall of tractor ties, representing **Fletcher Cox** and **Sheldon Richardson**, while ducking and dodging swaying heavy punching bags covered in stick'em on either side of the tackle lines, representing **Mario Williams** and **Muhammad Wilkerson**. They had to make sure not to step on the bear traps littered like landmines around the edges representing pursuing linebackers while looking downfield at moving targets simulating passing options "covered" by rolling nets labelled 20, 21, 24 and 27, the numbers of the Cubs secondary. A ball into the net was an interception, a ball on target a completion. When the candidate crossed the line of scrimmage, the assistant coaches rolled the wheeled tackle sleds across the field to simulate pursuing tacklers. It was a crowded and dangerous course, but then so was the Cubs defence.

It was not much of a contest. Hill kept getting knocked down by the rolling wall of tractor tires while Petty invariably ended up taking it in the ribs from the heavy punching bags. **RGIII**, ever evasive and intuitive, always got in the clear to throw a pass or scramble for a first down, but he did throw one ball into the no.27 net (**Malcolm Jenkins**) for an interception, which cost him 30 seconds and would have cost him the start had Petty not stepped on a bear trap on his final run.

**RGIII** was not so gracious in victory. In a pre-game interview on WTOC in Savannah after being named the starter he proclaimed himself "the leader of this team" and the "best chance to beat the Cubs."

This was one of those rare first round playoff match-ups where the visiting team was favoured over a healthy home team. It was also the first time that a playoff favourite had failed to beat the underdog in two previous match-ups during the regular season. So, "why?" was a natural question, even for the well-informed fan.

It is fair to say that, despite a loss and a tie against the Ravens during the season and a slightly inferior won-loss record, the Cubs simply pass the eyeball test better than the Ravens. The Cubs, after all, are a young team and still in the process of learning how to win games. Between the progressive game plans of **Deron Redding** and the 'Win Therapy' sessions of **Rodney Alberhasky Jr** during the week, the team had made big strides in finishing off opponents, experimenting with running-up the score on at least two occasions to hone the killer instinct and pitiless attitude necessary for a winning culture. The Cubs may have had more lapses than the Ravens, but they appeared to be putting everything together at the right time.

On the other hand, the Ravens had been preying on the very mindset summarized above to effectively ambush opponents from week-to-week. Questions at quarterback and durability fears tended to over-shadow the presence of super-talented assets,

such as three exciting and underrated receiving targets in **Randall Cobb**, **DeAndre Hopkins** and **Rob Gronkowski**; although none of them appeared on Pro Bowl or All Pro ballots, the three combined for 269 receptions, 3,104 yards and 28 touchdowns. Neither running back, **Jonathan Stewart** or rookie sidekick **Karlos Williams**, rushed for 1,000 yards, but they combined for 1,557 yards, a 5.1 yard average and 13 touchdowns, which would have ranked them as the no.3 running back in the league if they were one. The defence had holes in the secondary, but it also had stars at each level, with perennial all-stars **Gerald McCoy**, **Clay Matthews** and **Darrelle Revis** menacing opponents. It was a team that would sandbag you if you gave them the opportunity and too many opponents gave them that opportunity by focusing on the carnival sideshow at quarterback.

Ironically, it appeared to be that quarterback geek show that downed the Ravens in the end. For critics, the outcome of the quarter final game was an “I-told-you-so” moment; for apologists, it was just a bad game for RGIII – something all quarterbacks have from time to time. Decide for yourselves, dear readers, as I condense the action for you.

For three quarters this contest developed as expected by those who had predicted a Ravens victory. The Cubs had started well, holding the Ravens to a three-and-out on their first possession and marching 75 yards on nine plays to mark the scoreboard first when rising star **Russell Wilson** evaded pressure in the backfield long enough to find **Coby Fleener** in the end zone for six. But, like an ADD-afflicted teen, the Cubbies lost their focus after that. Maybe it was that their ball control possessions took too long to develop, or their simplistic defensive formations had their youngsters nodding off in boredom, but whatever the cause, the visitors appeared satisfied that they had proven their point and settled into going through the motions for a bit.

This played right into the Ravens game plan. Not a team to panic, they moved doggedly forward on offence, taking what they could get while trusting their defence to keep the sleepy Cubs contained. What they could get in the first half against a fresh and strong Cubs’ ‘D’ was a pair of field goals – not enough to win a game but enough to keep them in one while their strategists went to work dissecting the game film from the first half. The Cubs, meanwhile, were just happy to be leading 10-6 after 30 minutes:

*“We have the lead on the road. That’s what we were aiming for. We’re in a good position heading into the second half. GO CUBS!”* a confident **Deron Redding** sounded off to field reporter **Niki Noto** on the way to the locker room at half time.

The second half started disastrously for the Cubs. Ravens linebacker **Clay Matthews** registered a pair of big sacks, one on each of the Cubs first two possessions, to push them backwards on offence. On the other side, the Ravens struck quickly, with Cobb showing off his dynamism on a 46-yard catch-and-run for a touchdown and **Gerald McCoy** blocking a punt to set up a short field for a 3-yard **Jonathan Stewart** punch into the end zone. All of a sudden it was 20-10 and the fans at Bank of America Stadium were thundering their approval.

An exuberant RGIII got right into it. He played cheerleader to the crowd, roaming the field in front of the stands, waving his helmet over his head, fist-pumping and dancing like a fan. *“This is my Valentine’s gift to you, Charlotte!”* he yelled as he blew a kiss to the crowd. *“I give you this victory now give me some NOISE!”*

While the Beaufort quarterback was dancing like a fool, the now panicky Cubs flailed away on offence. Wilson tried to make up a big hunk of the deficit in one shot with a bomb to **Rueben Randle** but the ball had too much air underneath it and **Brent Grimes** tipped it away. They even tried their secret weapon, **Darren Sproles**, but the sage **Neil Shannon** saw it coming and doubled the shifty back on consecutive pass attempts, both incomplete. As the teams switched ends for the 4<sup>th</sup> and final quarter, the Ravens had the ball and the momentum. It looked they were about to move in for the kill.

A bouncy and manic RGIII strutted to the line, raising his arms as if exhorting the crowd to make more noise. This they dutifully did, setting aside their confusion about why their quarterback would want them to make noise when they had the ball. Maybe he wanted to drown out the Cubs’ **Chris Borland** as he barked adjustments to the defence – a different approach, but who are the fans to argue with success.

The Ravens quarterback was obviously having fun. He took the snap, dropped back, spun around in what looked like a dance move rather than a football move and, with a flamboyant flip of his wrist, winged the ball deep downfield. Even in the replay it is unclear who, exactly, **RGIII** was targeting on the throw. **DeAndre Hopkins** was the nearest Ravens receiver, but he turned *out* rather than *in*. Cobb was also in the general area looking as if he was setting up to block downfield. **Casey Hayward** was in a position to intercept the pass but, not expecting it to come directly at him with velocity, could only manage to get a hand on the ball. But that hand was enough to deflect its course into the arms of teammate **Malcolm Jenkins**. The Cubs safety snatched the wobbly ball and raced 52 yards to the Ravens 22 yard line. Two plays later, **Jeremy Hill** was breaking into the secondary for a 19-yard touchdown run. Suddenly, the Cubs’ deficit had shrunk to 3 points.

An obviously incensed **RGIII** berated Hopkins on the sideline, forcing teammates to get between them. Something had gone wrong and the now crazed Beaufort quarterback was letting everyone know who he thought had screwed up the play. RGIII stomped onto the field and glared at the Cubs defence. Hayward was bouncing around in the secondary and may have said something to the Ravens’ pivot. Griffin pointed to Hayward as he approached center for the first play of what Ravens fans hoped would be a long and productive drive. The Ravens’ QB bobbed his head in some kind of a taunting gesture, took the snap and stepped back. Barking *“Catch this, motherf&^\*er!”*, Griffin threw as hard as he was physically capable, rifling the pass straight into the gut of the Cubs’ corner. Hayward had no choice but to catch the ball. He clutched it to his chest and gasped as it nearly knocked the wind out of him. Griffin laughed maniacally and screamed, *“who is sucking now, bro?”*



Hayward recovered quickly, however. Seeing nothing between him and the goal line except for crazy **RGIII** celebrating the strength of his throwing arm with a showboat flex to the stunned crowd, he raced untouched the remaining 25 yards to the end zone for the major score. The pick-six had put the Cubs in front 24-20 and had irreversibly changed the game.

The shocking turnaround defied belief. At least, in that moment it must have, because disbelief is the only rational explanation for why the normally level-headed Coach Shannon did not make the switch to **Shaun Hill** or **Bryce Petty** at that point. The crowd grumbled its dissatisfaction as the Cubs lined up to kickoff but began to boo when RGIII raced onto the field like a cheetah on crack. Hyper, distracted and furious, the Ravens QB was in no condition to lead a comeback, but there he was, on the field, with a seemingly impossible task in front of him.

Griffin settled in well enough to avoid another interception, but he was frazzled and unable to keep the chains moving. The Ravens were forced to punt and were now at the mercy of 4<sup>th</sup> quarter magician **Russell Wilson**. Showing calmness and deliberation, ‘Mr. Russell’ took over, moving slickly in the pocket and taking advantage of Ravens double-coverage to scramble for runs of 9 and 32 yards. With the Cubs mammoth offensive line pushing downhill the whole way, **Jerick McKinnon** finished off a winded Ravens’ defence with a 1-yard dive for a touchdown. The score was now 31-20 for the Cubs with just 4 minutes remaining in the game.

Griffin was allowed to finish what he had started. He went down in a heap under the weight of **Jason Pierre-Paul** on 2<sup>nd</sup> down – the third sack of the day for the Cubs’ pass rush specialist – and finished by scrambling for five yards on 4<sup>th</sup> down, falling one foot short of the line of gain to turn the ball over for the last time. The Cubs added a field goal to make the final 34-20.

In the aftermath, the Ravens press conference was an incoherent schmozzle. Coach **Neil Shannon** had his quarterback’s back, as all good coaches do after a loss, but it was obvious that the effort to say the right thing was a huge strain: *“Robert is an emotional competitor. I felt we needed those qualities today,”* he droned on. *“There are a couple of plays I am sure he would like to have back,”* he added, almost choking on the words, *“but overall he gave us a chance to win that game.”*

**RGIII** would not get off the podium. After answering every conceivable question he started asking questions of reporters. At one point he called out **Alex Trench III** of the Beaufort Observer, asking him to rate, on a scale of 1 to 10, his pass to Cobb that the receiver turned into a 46-yard touchdown. *“Was it a 9 or a 10, Alex? You all like to criticize the mistakes, but what about the plays I did make? What about THEM?”*

Cubs coach, **Deron Redding** was gracious in victory and suspiciously eager to absolve Griffin of any poor play. Without a hint of guile, he declared *“I am so proud of my guys. They dug deep and beat a great team today. They beat a great quarterback when it mattered. I am going to take a moment to savour this before focusing on the game plan for the Patriots.”*

So, the Cubs move on and the Ravens have all the time they could need to ponder their quarterback situation. Is the allure of RGIII’s undeniable talent worth the risk of the volatility that comes with it? Another question, for another time.....

#### ***QUARTER FINAL ROUND UP***

The mysterious cowed figure was nowhere and everywhere during the first playoff round. The North America Bigfoot Hunters Association reported three sightings: one in Durham in the jungle surrounding Jurassic Park; one in Charleswood at the pre-game tailgate (where it was apparently seen drinking a Blue and scarpering off after snatching up a couple of burgers from an unattended grill); and another in Charlotte, where it was accidentally interrupted mid-business inside a public bathroom stall at the stadium. The TV show, *Ghost Hunters*, shot video of what it claims was the *shadow* of the cowed figure as it snuck away from the Cowtown sideline after urinating in Joe Flacco’s water bottle. *Titter* was abuzz, of course, with literally hundreds of real or imagined sightings, fueling the theory that the cowed figure is a supernatural being with super powers. But there is no photographic or real evidence to support any of these sightings. Officially, however, the cowed figure was nowhere to be found in the quarter final round.

At Patriot Place, Triumph fans who wanted to see what their team could do against the Pats with a turnover-free game from **Jay Cutler** finally got their wish. Cutler threw 36 times without an interception and his lone fumble was recovered by teammate **Charles Clay**, but the Triumph still lost decisively to Charleswood, 31-17. The only difference this time was that it took longer for the Triumph to lose their grip on the game.

Tied 17-17 mid-way through the 3rd quarter, it looked briefly like the game could go either way. Twin Cities had just scored on a 6-yard touchdown pass from Cutler to **Kendall Wright** following a 66-yard drive that had consisted almost entirely of runs by rookie **Melvin Gordon** and a surprise end-around by Wright. The Pats had benefitted from a couple of big plays – a 42-yard hitch to **Andre Johnson** to set up a field goal and a 35-yard touchdown pass to **Jason Witten** – but the offence had been unable to sustain possession for a score since a 62-yard 1<sup>st</sup> quarter touchdown drive had opened the scoring.

**Peyton Manning** was looking just *okay*, with his incapacity, or unwillingness, to stretch the field ensuring that his skill players would have to make something happen in order to generate big plays. As it turned out, that was exactly what happened on the play that led to the winning touchdown. Witten found a gap between the Triumph linebackers and took a little toss from Manning 41 yards to the 9 yard line. From there it took **Lamar Miller** two attempts to get the ball into the end zone to make the score 24-17 Charleswood early in the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter.

All eyes were on Cutler to see, in the moment of truth, which version of him was in uniform that day. Surprisingly, it was neither the “good” nor the “bad” Cutler. It was a seldom-seen third version, the “mediocre” Cutler that took the fate of the

Triumph into his hands. The mediocre Jay made some plays and not others. He did not implode, nor did he explode. He missed on a long pass after a holding penalty and run stuff put his team into a 3<sup>rd</sup> and long hole. What mediocre quarterback would not have done the same? After the Pats responded to the Triumph's three-and-out with another touchdown drive to make it 31-17, Cutler did what one might expect an average quarterback to do against a good defence protecting a lead: he moved the ball for a bit then turned it over on downs – twice. *Ho-hum.....move along folks, nothing to see here.*

After 17 weeks of exhilarating highs and a few infuriating lows, the season ended quietly for Coach **Guy Williams**. Pundits, having already written Version A (the “Good” Cutler) and Version B (the “Bad” Cutler) of their post-game columns, had to scramble to write Version C and try to explain how the Triumph had lost without **Jay Cutler** playing a prominent role either way. A few tried blaming 103 yards in Triumph penalties for continually back-footing the visitors. I have a simpler theory: the Patriots are a better team, *were* the better team that day, and they simply won. Period. Let's move on.....

Finally, on an appropriately rainy, gloomy day at Jurassic Park, black towels were everywhere to be seen and the haunting melody of ‘*My Heart Will Go On*,’ from the movie, *Titanic*, pumped over the PA as fans entered the stadium. Thunder Lizards owner, **Celine Dion** had declared a ‘Game of Mourning’ for her departed husband and agent, **René Angélil**. Black towels stamped with René's smiling face were handed out to every fan with a personal request from the owner that they be waved in the air when the home team did something worthy of a cheer, but to please refrain from cheering during the game out of respect for her late husband. *Oh boy!*

Of course, the Durham fans could only contain themselves for so long. The eerie swishing of towels, punctuated by soft, polite clapping that followed the Lizards' opening touchdown, could not be expected to last once the game got hot. The clapping got a little louder and a few hoots of pleasure could be heard after Durham's second touchdown – a 6-yard run by **Carlos Hyde** – made it 14-0. A big cheer seemed imminent, but an uninterrupted 17-point pushback by the Gladiators kept a lid on the noise of the crowd. With Durham trailing in the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter and emotions simmering as fans sensed their promising season was on the line, **Drew Brees** led **Eric Decker** into the open on a medium fly for a 46-yard touchdown pass for the go-ahead and eventual winning touchdown. The crowd spontaneously erupted in cacophonous joy, cheering wildly and loudly. This outburst prompted a veiled Dion to jump out of her seat and storm away from her luxury box in tears. Oh well, *her heart will go on.....*

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## JIMMY'S CONFERENCE CHAMPIONSHIP PICKS

### PACIFIC-ATLANTIC CONFERENCE

**IOWA CITY @ CHARLESWOOD (line – CUBS by 3)**

**INJURIES:** Iowa City – None; Charleswood – None.

The no.1 seeded Patriots, tied for the best record in the league and playing at home, weigh in as 3-point underdogs to the no.3 seeded, lapse-prone Cubbies. This line may catch some people by surprise, but those who have been keeping score at home will recognize it immediately as a product of a Cubs hot streak and the week 11 romp that handed Charleswood its only loss of the season. That game, too, was at Patriot Place and it wasn't even close. The Cubs dominated the trenches, holding the Pats to 284 yards and 15 first downs, most of those in “garbage time,” while paving a path for 151 yards and 2 touchdowns by second-year back-up running back, Jerick McKinnon in a decisive 36-13 win. It was one of those games that got out of hand early and featured big plays that don't happen every day, such as a 71-yard touchdown romp by McKinnon, a 56-yard interception return for Casey Hayward, and 2 Pats turnovers. But the image of the Cubs bold posture and aggression compared with the Pats flat-footedness in that game resonated powerfully with the many viewers who tuned in to watch what, prophetically, did turn out to be a PAC Championship preview. 17 games into the Cubs' 2015 campaign the overall impression of Deron Redding's young powerhouse is



that it certainly is capable of doing enough to win the whole shebang but, for no obvious reason, does not always rise to its own level. Like a bunch of 12-year olds, there is no telling when or why the team will be “on” or “off” on any given Sunday. In their quarter final game the offence dozed off in the middle two frames before awakening to the sound of the defence celebrating back-to-back interceptions, including one returned for a touchdown, in a 24-point 4<sup>th</sup> quarter. The late heroics of Russell Wilson notwithstanding, the Cubs will need to be more consistent with the ball from start to finish if they hope to knock off the Pats for a second time this year in their house. Expect the league’s top rushing attack to establish itself prior to testing the league’s no.1 rated pass defence, but don’t be too surprised if Redding attempts a couple of early, off-tempo long throws to Rueben Randle or Mike Wallace to keep the Pats ‘D’ from crowding the line. For their part, the Pats need to toughen up, both mentally and physically, if they are to bring the veteran coolness and playoff experience of Peyton Manning to bear on the brash youth of the Cubbies. When the Pats have the ball, the stout front four of the Cubs will be a difficult test for the flashy Lamar Miller and the rookie Duke Johnson, so Peyton will need to be on target through the air to open up room for the running game. With Dez Bryant on the flank supported by Andre Johnson on the other side and Jason Witten off the line, he has the weapons to keep blue chip d-backs, Corey Graham and Malcolm Jenkins busy. There are no injuries to report for either side, meaning an equal footing start to the game. Health and conditioning could still end up being a deciding factor in the outcome, however. For all their talent and ability, the Cubs defensive front is known to tire and individual players are not above taking plays off. This game will not look anything like the regular season laughter between these clubs. Expect a strong start by the home team, a late challenge by the visitors and a field goal to decide it. **PICK: CHARLESWOOD**

## **CAN-AM CONFERENCE**

### **DURHAM @ AURORA (line – MUSTANGS by 4)**

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

This was the scenario the Thunder Lizards dreaded: a return trip to Aurora to face the team that steamrolled them 35-7 in Week 13. As bad as that game was for Durham, it could have been worse; the Mustangs uncharacteristically backed off the throttle, not calling a single pass play in the second half. Perhaps they anticipated this day would come and that too hard a pull on the tyrannosaurus tail might provide extra revenge incentive in the re-match. To their discredit, the Lizards acquiesced in calling it an early afternoon that day, inserting Nick Foles for Drew Brees in the second half and running Darren McFadden into the line to burn off time. It was one of the more bizarre games of the regular season and hopefully not a foreshadowing of this Conference Championship match-up. On paper the Lizards should give the Mustangs a run for their money. Durham has a true shutdown defensive backfield, one that held opponents to a league-low 149 yards passing per game in the regular season. Against a team that relies heavily on the deep vertical game to shock opponents into submission, it would appear to be an intense yet favourable match-up for the Lizards. But in their regular season meeting, Matt Ryan threw for 244 yards in the 1<sup>st</sup> half, making Durham’s celebrated secondary look less than ordinary. There was no relief on the ground either, as Arian Foster ran for 143 yards and 2 touchdowns, with a significant amount of that yardage coming in “quality time” prior to the second half tent-folding. It was a mauling of epic proportions in the making until both teams called the game off 30 minutes early. The good news for Durham fans is that the Lizards are bound to perform better this time, having almost no room to fall further down from the rock bottom level of that earlier debacle. The question is: how much better? One adjustment they can make when they have the ball is to run more receiving patterns and trust Drew Brees to make the quick read and check down if necessary. In the previous contest they often held back two extra pass blockers in fear of JJ Watt and the Aurora pass rush, but the Mustangs corners were up to the task of shadowing the Durham wide receivers that day, leaving Brees without an outlet. They will want to test the running game too, but will not waste time trying to make it work if it struggles early. When the Mustangs have possession they can be expected to continue doing what they have always done – switch up the formations, leave all options on the table regardless of which formation they are in, and challenge the defence. They should be cautious about being over-aggressive; it worked last time they faced Durham, but it bit them a couple of times last week against the Corn Kings and Foster had to run to the rescue of the offence. Expect the Durham secondary to be up for this game and Ryan to be largely contained as a result. The unknown is how well Brees will play. If he is on, expect an upset. If not, a comfortable win for the reigning champs. **PICK: AURORA**

