

## IN BRIEF

Drew Bledsoe wasn't a top choice in most fantasy leagues, considered well past his prime and signed in Dallas primarily to execute handoffs.

The Giants' Eli Manning was equally undesirable, known simply as the other Manning, the one whose main job also mostly entailed handing the ball to somebody else.

Yet heading into Sunday's Giants-Cowboys game, they are among the NFC's top quarterbacks. For fantasy players smart enough to have acquired them, one burning question remains: Can they keep it up all season?

It's a troubling question if you have Bledsoe. Remember his fast start in 2002? He threw 16 touchdowns in the first eight games, then just eight the rest of the way. The next year he had 11 TDs. And last year he had a couple of nice games in Buffalo's late-season run, but still had only three scores in his final four games.

It's hard to guess whether Manning can keep going. In his rookie year last season, he was just starting to figure things out as the season was wrapping up. (For the record, he has a brother who's pretty good late in the season.)

So what do you do with these guys? I say ride them as long as they produce and worry about the end of the season later — all the while keeping a watchful eye on the waiver wire, just in case.

While you ponder their futures, here are some other players to start this week, some to bench and some long shots who just might pan out:

**Quarterbacks: A Safe Bet**

See above. Bledsoe has 10 TDs in five games and faces a leaky, beat-up secondary. Because consistency is impossible in the NFL, Manning (9 TDs) should have a big day against a

defense that last week dominated Philadelphia's Donovan McNabb.

The Tennessee defense has come to mean one thing for fantasy players: Come and get it! Especially for Carson Palmer and the Bengals, who suddenly aren't so used to losing.

Tom Brady's passing has kept the Patriots afloat since they stopped playing defense. He's thrown for 300 yards in each of New England's three wins. He only had two 300-yard games all last season.

The Chargers' Drew Brees could have another big day against Oakland's woeful pass defense. Last season he had a career-high five TDs in a win over the Raiders.

The Atlanta starter should do well against the Saints, either Michael Vick running or Matt Schaub passing. (Disclaimer and possible fantasy tip: Vick has failed miserably every time I've predicted success for him.)

**Back away slowly and nobody gets hurt**

Please, in the name of Akili Smith, don't start these guys:

Even before he imploded, Minnesota's Daunte Culpepper struggled at Chicago. He has four TDs and six interceptions in his last three games there.

Seattle's Matt Hasselbeck's a nice quarterback, but sit him against Houston unless your fantasy league awards points for successful handoffs.

The big Florida showdown between Miami's Gus Frerotte and Tampa's Brian Griese probably will not be fun to watch.

**Running backs all day long**

What's wrong with Cincinnati's Rudi Johnson? He hasn't hit 100 yards or scored a touchdown since opening day, but the Titans should make it all better.

Baltimore's Jamal Lewis has been slowly improving, and the Browns aren't really into making runners stop. Has it already been two years since Lewis ran for an NFL-record 295 yards against Cleveland?

Chargers defensive backs can't keep their hands to themselves, meaning plenty of pass interference calls for Oakland's Randy Moss and plenty of chances for 1-yard TD plunges for Lamont Jordan.

Whoever's running for Chicago should enjoy the day against whoever's not tackling in Minnesota. Start Thomas Jones if he plays, or Cedric Benson, against the NFL's worst run defense.

Take the advice of Kevin Jones and start him for Detroit against the Panthers. (According to teammate Roy Williams, Jones owns himself on his fantasy team. Imagine that odd draft-day moment: "I'll take . . . me.")

**He could find a seam**

Rueben Droughns of Cleveland has been productive but hasn't scored yet. That could change against the Ravens, who are letting just about anybody into the end zone these days. (Artose Pinner and Shawn Bryson on the same day?)

**Red flags**

All the geniuses who landed Pittsburgh's Willie Parker have to pipe down now that he's sharing time with Jerome Bettis — at least until the Bus' next injury.

Before you get too excited about starting New Orleans' Antowain Smith or Aaron Stecker in place of the injured Deuce McAllister, remember that they are Antowain Smith and Aaron Stecker.

Don't start Ricky Williams or Ronnie Brown of Miami, who are splitting carries against a tough Tampa defense.

**Wide receivers throw him the darn ball!**

Rod Smith has been awfully quiet for the Broncos the past few weeks, but he should resume his big-time possession numbers against the beat-up Patriots.

The Redskins are headed to Arrowhead, a bad locale when you

just recently forgot how to stop the run. Look for Santana Moss to cash in on garbage-time yardage in the comeback attempt.

Speaking of garbage time, rookie Troy Williamson of the Vikings is developing into a crafty young trash man. He's had a score when things were out of hand, or on the way there, in his past two games.

The Cowboys seem to spread it around a lot, so how about Keyshawn Johnson this week against a Giants defense that's been yielding 322 yards passing a game. Maybe a TD or two will patch things up with Bledsoe after last week's sideline spat.

San Diego's Keenan McCardell has only had one catch in each of the past two weeks, so he's due for a big game against a poor Raiders pass defense. He caught 11 passes, including a TD, in two games against the Raiders last year.

**Maybe throw him the darn ball?**

Houston's Jabar Gaffney could be a long, long, long shot. Andre Johnson is hurt and the Texans will get more practice with this whole forward pass thing while playing catch-up with the Seahawks. And really, how long can an NFL offense continue averaging 89 yards passing?

**Learn how to throw the darn ball**

If you're still starting Jets, Lions, Bears or Ravens, let me see if I can make this any more clear: Their quarterbacks are not good.

**TIGHT ENDS TO WATCH NOT NAMED GATES:** Jason Witten (Cowboys), Courtney Anderson (Raiders), Todd Heap (Ravens), Alex Smith (Bucs). And can somebody please throw Kansas City's Tony Gonzalez a touchdown so we don't have to see any more highlights of him being frustrated?

**DEFENSES TO WATCH:** Seahawks, Bears, Colts, Bills, Bucs.

**KICKERS TO WATCH:** Nobody really wants to watch kickers, but here are some anyway: Jay Feely (Giants), Josh Brown (Seahawks), Jose Cortez (Cowboys), Nate Kaeding (Chargers), Lawrence Tynes (Chiefs).

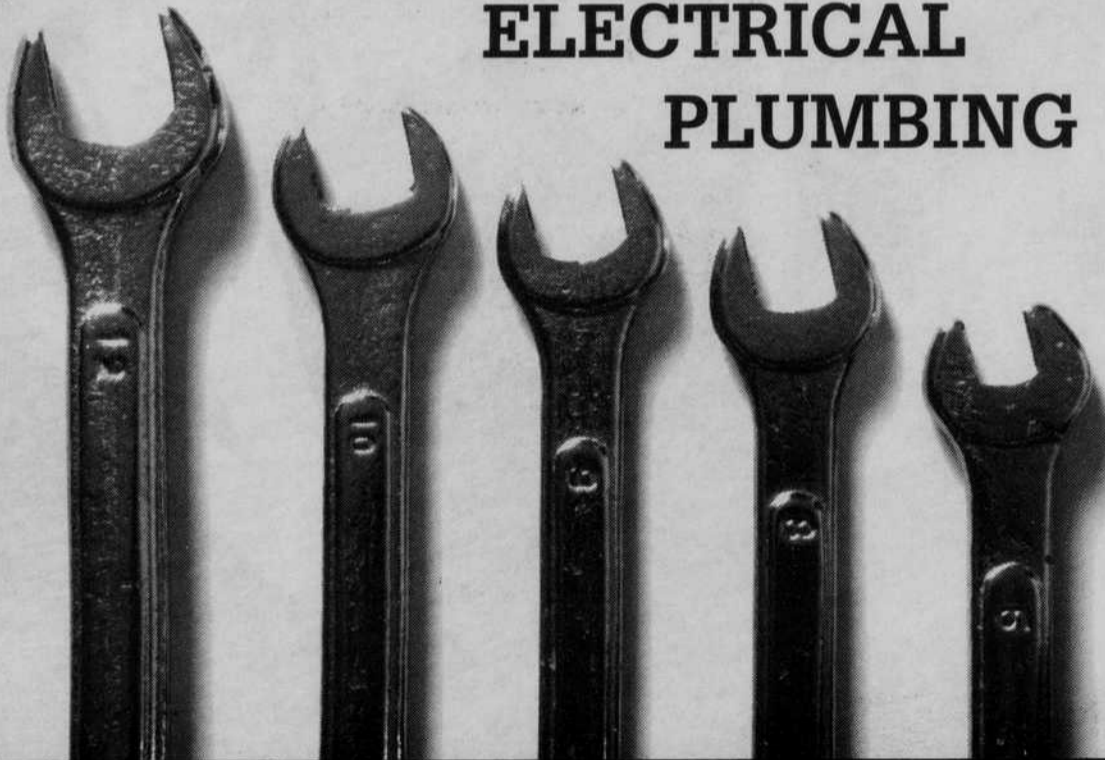
**What do I know?**

Here's the best and worst of last week's projections:

**Big Hits:** I predicted big games for Green Bay's Brett Favre (3 TDs) and Arizona's Josh McCown (394 yards, 2 TDs), as well as breakout games for Chicago's Thomas Jones (137 yards), Domanick Davis (173 total yards) and Terry Glenn (118 yards, 2 TDs).

**Big Misses:** I thought the Colts' Peyton Manning (1 TD) would shred the 49ers, and that the Eagles defense would shred Dallas' Drew Bledsoe (289 yards, 3 TDs). I also was the last guy on the Willie Parker (26 yards) bandwagon when it flew off the cliff. And I thought David Givens (14 yards) would catch lots of passes.

— The Associated Press

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