

Sport Talk

by Ron Sykes, Sports Editor

A glance at the NFL

Chicago at Minnesota

This is a game of "who-can-tell" teams—meaning that throughout the season both teams have been unpredictable. Minnesota is relatively injury-free as are the Bears. Both teams are having quarterback problems. Steve Dils is up and down for the Vikings as is his counterpart Jim McMahon of Chicago. Chicago, 6-8, on the season is stronger on the ground because of all-pro running back Walter Payton. Dil has the best receivers led by ex-Stanford great Darrin Nelson. Minnesota rates a one-point edge only because they're playing at home. A loss by Minnesota will result in the first division title for the Detroit Lions in 27 years. In last week's games the Bears put 28 points on the scoreboard in a losing cause against Green Bay, while Minnesota was able to score only two against Detroit.

Cleveland at Houston

This is a must win for the Browns, and almost a sure win against the hapless Oilers. The Browns are trailing the fast-fading Steelers by only one game. Cleveland at 8-6 should easily shutdown the 1-13 Oilers. Earl Campbell, Oiler running back, is coming off a brilliant 134-yd. performance against the Miami Dolphins last week. Campbell kept Houston in the game before finally falling 24-17. This kind of repeat performance could mean trouble for the Browns. Even on the road Cleveland should win by 10.

San Francisco at Buffalo

This game is a biggie for the 49ers. Both teams are coming in with identical records—8-6—and both stand second in their divisional standings. There's a great deal of similarity here.

Buffalo has the best defensive unit, while the 49ers offense rates superior. However, a look at the stats would show that Buffalo has allowed their opponents a total of 297 points, while the Niners have allowed just 266. A further look will reveal that the Bills have gone up against the better offensive teams. Joe Montana is on a roll and when Joe is hot the 49ers are a darn good football team. No key injuries. Take the Forty Niners by a field goal.

Washington at Dallas

This can be nothing but a toss-up. Some odds makers are giving Dallas a 2½-point edge for whatever reasons. But a betting man would be hard pressed to find 50 people in the State of Texas that would take Dallas and give 2½ points to the Skins. This is one for all the UCRs in the U.S.A. to work overtime on. This will be a game that will be put in the home video library. One that you will want to replay again and again. When good friends get together for a few brews, this one should be a classic. Both teams are loaded.

The Redskins do have one big advantage and that plus is at QB. Joe Thiesmann is just more consistent than Dallas' Denny White. And that

will be the edge for Washington.

Baltimore at Denver

Baltimore, 6-8, and Denver, 8-6, have both struggled at times during this season. Remember that Baltimore dominated young John Elway earlier this season and only lost 17-10 after Steve Debery rescued the Stanford Flash in the fourth quarter. This will not be a repeat performance. Young John has learned a lot since that earlier meeting. He's now better able to read defenses; he's picking his keys better, and showing the poise of a veteran. Elway has undergone a transformation. Denver is back in the playoff picture—they're at home and should win by 6½.

Seattle at New York Giants

Seattle, 7-7, still has playoff hopes. The Giants at 3-10 can only wait until next year. New York's solid defense is constantly under pressure by woefully inept offense. Scott Brunner is not the QB of the future. His performance to date has been too erratic. As a result the good defense has had 299 points scored against them this season, which isn't bad considering. As a comparison, the LA Raiders, who have climbed the AFC west, has allowed opponents 290 points while compiling an 11-3 record. A record that stands third overall behind the 12-2 Redskins and Dallas Cowboys.

Seattle, while making good progress, must still find a quarterback. Dave Krieg, who took over for the veteran Jim Zorn, is not the answer. Look for Coach Chuck Knox to clean house. It's a well-known fact that Husky Warren Moor is interested in Seattle.

"There's a few teams that I would love to play for," beamed Moon, "and Seattle would be my first choice, but I will monitor their situation the rest of the year, then make my decision." Moon led the Toronto Argonauts to five championships in six years. And this year was named MVP in the Canadian Football League. Moon, a Black quarterback, of which there are many in Canada, and few in the U.S., has had NFL scouts drooling for four years now. At 6-3, 215 pounds, Warren possesses all the tools needed to be an outstanding signal caller.

Warren is definitely in Seattle's plans. But even without Moon Seattle should beat the Giants. Seattle by 7.

Kansas City at San Diego

Dan Fouts is back and that alone spells trouble for KC and the rest of the NFL. With Fouts at the helm the Chargers are just a much better football team. Both teams have 5-9 records and are eliminated from any post-season play. This one should have been included on the ABC Monday night schedule. Take San Diego by 5.

New England at L.A. Rams

New England will be so glad to get out of the snow that they will

bring the Rams. Coach John Robinson and Ron Myer (New England) are two of the better new coaches in the NFL. The Rams must win to remain tied with 49ers in NFL West. New England (7-7) is a game behind Buffalo in tough AFL East. Both

teams playoff chances are very much alive.

The Eagles found a way to shut down Eric Dickerson. New England will have to do likewise in order to win. Pick the Eagles by 1.

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