

NFL GAMEDAY

WEEK 18

NEW ORLEANS SAINTS @ SEATTLE SEAHAWKS

THE SIGNS WERE PLAIN ENOUGH.

NO TEAM HAD EVER SKULKED INTO THE PLAYOFFS SO DARKLY.

HIGH-FLYING BRAVADO ? THAT WAS FOR THE SAINTS.

THE LOW-FLYING SEAHAWKS REVELED IN THEIR ROLE AS THE UNWELCOME AND UNWORTHY.

DREW BREES COULD HAVE BEEN FORGIVEN FOR SALIVATING AT HIS PROSPECTS.

ON PAPER SEATTLE WASN'T MUCH OF TEST. AND AT THE START, THEY WEREN'T MUCH BETTER ON TURF.

HIS OPPOSITE NUMBER MATT HASSELBECK COULD HARDLY HAVE STARTED WORSE.

TWICE, THE SAINTS OPENED 10 POINT LEADS.

MIDWAY THROUGH THE FIRST QUARTER, INSPIRATION SEEMED TO STRIKE.

SUDDENLY, HASSELBECK WAS SUBLIME. HIS RECEIVERS IM POSSSIBLY OPEN.

THE SEAHAWK DEFENSE SPONGY FOR SO LONG, STIFFENED.

GIVEN THE BALL BACK, HASSELBECK DIDN'T MISS HIS CHANCE.

HIS THIRD TOUCHDOWN PASS PUT SEATTLE AHEAD 24 17.

PHYSICAL UP FRONT, BUT DEFT IN THE POCKET, SEATTLE OPENED THE SECOND HALF PRECISELY AS THEY HAD CLOSED THE FIRST.

WITH EACH SCORE QWEST FIELD ROCKED WITH HOPE, AND WITH EACH ROAR, THE SAINTS LOOKED FARTHER FROM HOME.

THE NOISE CAUSED CONFUSION AND FALSE STARTS.

DREW BREES LOOKED LESS LIKE A MESSIAH THAN A MAN AT THE END OF HIS ROPE.

STILL, THE SAINTS WERE WORLD CHAMPS. AND CHAMPIONS DON'T DIE EASILY. BREES STARTED THE FOURTH QUARTER WITH A DRIVE EQUAL PARTS IMPROV AND DESPERATION/IT WORKED.

DUSK BROUGHT GLOOM. MOMENTUM WAS GONE. THE SEAHAWKS NEEDED SOMETHING. THEY GOT EVERYTHING.

THE GREATEST RUN IN POSTSEASON HISTORY? COULD BE.

BUT THIS MUCH IS CERTAIN, THE UNWORTHY AND UNWELCOME PLAYED A GAME FOR THE AGES. NOW THEY'LL GET TO PLAY AGAIN.

NEW YORK JETS @ INDIANAPOLIS COLTS

THE JETS BEGAN THIS YEAR'S PLAYOFFS WHERE LAST YEARS ENDED, BUT NEW YORK IS USED TO THE ROAD, WHERE IT'S LAST 8 PLAYOFF GAMES HAVE BEEN.

HIGH THROWS MADE MARK SANCHEZ LOOK IN OVER HIS HEAD IN THE FIRST HALF, WHEN HE PASSED FOR A MEAGER 84 YARDS AND THE JETS WERE SHUT OUT.

INDIANAPOLIS LOOKED TO WALK ALL OVER LADAINIAN TOMLINSON, BUT THE THIRTY-ONE YEAR OLD VETERAN PROVED HE STILL HAS MORE THAN A STEP LEFT RUSHING FOR 82 YARDS AND TWO TOUCHDOWNS.

DOWN BY A POINT, A FUTURE HALL OF FAME KICKER FACED A FIFTY YARD FIELD GOAL WITH UNDER A MINUTE LEFT.

ONCE AGAIN NEW YORK WAS LIVING ON THE EDGE, TRAILING BY TWO WITH FIFTY-THREE SECONDS TO PLAY.

BALTIMORE RAVENS @ KANSAS CITY CHIEFS

THE CHIEFS WERE UNDERDOGS AGAINST ONE OF THE BEASTS OF THE EAST, BUT IN THE FIRST HALF KANSAS CITY SHOWED BALTIMORE HOW THE WEST WAS WON.

THE RAVENS DEFENSE MADE THE CHIEFS GO BELLY UP.

THEY GOT FAT OFF OF 5 TURNOVERS, AND NOW HAVE FORCED AT LEAST 4 TURNOVERS IN THEIR LAST 3 WILD CARD GAMES.

GREEN BAY PACKERS @ PHILADELPHIA EAGLES

THE EAGLES AND PACKERS BEGAN THE PLAYOFFS THE SAME WAY THEY OPENED THE REGULAR SEASON – FACING EACH OTHER IN PHILADELPHIA.

FIREWORKS EXPLODED ON THE FIRST PLAY WHEN GREEN BAY'S PASS RUSH LIT UP MICHAEL VICK.

EAGLES DEFENDERS ALSO STRUGGLED TO STAY ON THEIR FEET.

THE PACKERS DOMINATED THE LINE OF SCRIMMAGE AND RE-ESTABLISHED A ONCE DORMANT RUNNING GAME.

#44 JAMES STARKS RUSHED FOR 123 YARDS. HE HAD 101 THE ENTIRE REGULAR SEASON.

GREEN BAY JUMPED TO A 14-0 LEAD.

THE PACKERS SHOULD HAVE HAD ANOTHER SCORE JUST BEFORE THE HALF.

EARLY IN THE THIRD QUARTER, THE EAGLES GOT THEIR FIRST BREAK.

THE PACKERS RESPONDED WITH AN ELEVEN-PLAY SCORING DRIVE ON THEIR NEXT POSSESSION.

AFTER DAVID AKERS MISSED HIS SECOND FIELD GOAL TRY OF THE GAME, PHILADELPHIA STILL NEEDED TWO POSSESSIONS. AS THEY HAVE ALL SEASON, THE EAGLES TURNED TO MICHAEL VICK.

WITH LESS THAN TWO MINUTES TO PLAY, VICK WAS CLOSING IN ON YET ANOTHER COME-FROM-BEHIND VICTORY.