

CASE NFL

NFL WEEK 13

1. Bears -7 hosting Chiefs (1 unit)

It's become obvious why Tyler Palko has been waived by not only four different NFL teams, but also released by a CFL and USFL team, too: The guy cannot play. Palko has turned the ball over seven times in his two starts the past two weeks. The Chiefs are trying to get Kyle Orton up to speed to replace Palko, but that may not happen this week. Even if Orton does play, it's not like he's some great quarterback savior either. The Bears also are well acquainted with Orton since he played four years for them. Chicago is playing top-notch defense. The Bears are holding opposing running backs to 3.2 yards per carry on 60 attempts during the last three weeks. The Chiefs have one of the worst rushing attacks since losing Jamaal Charles for the season. The three-headed monster of Thomas Jones, Dexter McCluster and Jackie Battle is a monster only to the Chiefs.

The Bears' pass defense has been even more effective than their run defense. Chicago has come up with 12 interceptions while allowing just five touchdown passes during the last six games, holding quarterbacks to 58.4 percent and 6.3 yards per attempt. Cornerback Charles Tillman is having a Pro Bowl type season. Palko has yet to throw a touchdown in his two starts.

Kansas City has scored the grand total of 25 points in its last four games, failing to break the 10-point barrier in any game during this span. The Bears' offense should be better with Caleb Hanie making his second start and first at home. Matt Forte is having his finest season and Marion Barber has been surprising effective lately.

The Chiefs came out with a great effort at home playing on Sunday night last week, but they aren't nearly talented enough to hang close unless producing another "A" game. Even if they were to do that a second consecutive week - which is highly doubtful - their horrendous quarterback play would do them in.

2. Falcons-Texans Over 37 1/2 (2 units)

This total is very low considering the skill position talent on these two teams. Rain is in the forecast, too, but Houston's Reliant Stadium has a retractable roof.

The Texans are vastly improved defensively, but they have not faced a strong offense in their last five games. During this span they've played Tennessee, Jacksonville, Cleveland, Tampa Bay and Jacksonville.

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Ben Roethlisberger and Drew Brees are the only two outstanding quarterbacks Houston has gone against. Matt Ryan is far closer to those two than Blaine Gabbert and Colt McCoy.

The Falcons back Ryan with tremendous skill position balance in Michael Turner, Roddy White, Julio Jones and Tony Gonzalez.

Atlanta ranks No. 2 in run defense. Houston's Arian Foster, though, is an elite runner and is healthy. Since returning from a hamstring injury, Foster has averaged 154 all-purpose yards per game.

The key is how many points can the Texans put up with third-string quarterback T.J. Yates. I say enough to get this comfortably over the total.

First off, the Texans have a tremendous 1-2 running attack of Foster and Ben Tate, who could start for a number of teams. Second, Yates actually has a stronger arm and is more athletic than Matt Leinart. The Texans are high on Yates, who won't be afraid to throw downfield unlike dink-and-dunker Leinart. Yates also has a full week to prepare unlike last Sunday when he unexpectedly had to replace Leinart. Expect a much better performance from Yates this week. Third, Andre Johnson is back. Before Johnson hurt his hamstring, he was in the argument for best wide receiver in the AFC. Fourth, and this is huge, Atlanta has injuries in its secondary. Out is Brent Grimes, the Falcons' top cornerback. Also out is nickel back Kelvin Hayden. That's two of Atlanta's top three corners out leaving just Dunta Robinson, a former Texan who's having a bad season. The Falcons' secondary was vulnerable even before these injuries ranking 23rd in pass defense.

3. Lions-Saints Over 53 (1 unit)

Going over 49 used to be a stop sign in the NFL. Not anymore, especially when two outstanding quarterbacks go against vulnerable defenses in a dome setting. When healthy, Matthew Stafford is an elite quarterback. Stafford was practicing this week without a splint on his previously broken right index finger. Before that injury, he was effective as any quarterback.

The Lions have the passing attack. What they need is a ground game, which should return this week with Kevin Smith back from an ankle injury that sidelined him early in the Lions' Thanksgiving loss to Green Bay. Smith was running better than he ever has before suffering the injury.

Detroit is averaging 28.7 points per game. In road dome games, the Lions are averaging 30 points having played at Dallas and Minnesota. Both of these teams have better defenses than the Saints, who rank 25th in total defense.

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So the Lions should get their share of points. Certainly the Saints are going to put up a big number. Their offense has been unstoppable at home where they are averaging 41.6 points in five games. Drew Brees is in the midst of another monster season and has his full complement of weapons.

If this isn't enough, the Lions are missing key defensive players. Ndamukong Suh is suspended. That renders the Lions' edge pass rushers less effective since Suh would tie up two blockers.

The Lions also have multiple injuries in their secondary, the biggest loss being star free safety Louis Delmas.

Detroit wasn't going to be holding a Saints offense, clicking on all cylinders, in check it were healthy. Now the Lions really have little chance of holding the Saints down.

4. Chargers -3 at Jacksonville (Monday) (2 units)

As bad as the Chargers have been - and they've been brutal - they have a chance to get back into the AFC West race even though they trail Oakland by three games. The Chargers should win this game and beat Buffalo at home next week. The Raiders are underdogs at Miami and then have to play on the road against the Packers next week. So the Chargers could pick up two games right there on the Raiders, who they meet in the final week.

Jacksonville can't score enough points to beat any team and its defense no longer can keep them in games due to recent multiple injuries.

The Jaguars continue to force feed Blaine Gabbert, who simply is not a starting-caliber NFL quarterback at this early stage of his career. He lacks pocket presence and accuracy. Jacksonville is last in passing yards, total offense and in scoring averaging 12.5 points a game.

Malcom Floyd is slated to return from injury giving Philip Rivers another quality receiving target to go with Vincent Jackson and Antonio Gates. Ryan Mathews is coming off a 142-yard rushing game.

During the past few weeks, the Jaguars have lost key defensive personnel, including nose tackle Terrance Knighton, defensive end Matt Roth, linebacker Clint Session and cornerback Rashean Mathis, their top cover man.

This also is the Jaguars' first game in nine years without coach Jack Del Rio. The Jaguars proved dangerous on Monday night in Week 7 at home upsetting Baltimore.

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Rivers, though, is a far better quarterback than Joe Flacco and the Jaguars weren't nearly as decimated on defense as they are now.

5. 49ers -13 hosting Rams (2 units)

This seems like a lot of points to lay in a division game with a weak offense, but it's really not considering the matchup.

The Rams can't score, don't stop the run and now may not have Sam Bradford, who didn't practice on Thursday because of a flare-up of an ankle injury.

Bradford, Steven Jackson and Brandon Lloyd are the Rams' only decent offensive players. Bradford doesn't have much time to throw because of the Rams' five-step dropback style and having a leaky, battered offensive line. Jackson doesn't figure to have success against a top-ranked 49ers run defense that hasn't allowed a 100-yard rusher nor allowed a rushing touchdown.

San Francisco has given up the fewest points in the NFL at 14.6 per game. St. Louis is averaging 12.7 points per game, lowest of any team except Jacksonville. The Rams have covered only two of their past 12 games. They are a dome team playing on a grass field lacking motivation and confidence. The 49ers have had extra time to prepare and stew about losing the Harbaugh Bowl on Thanksgiving. They'll be happy to take their frustrations out on the punchless Rams.

Alex Smith is a limited passer, but even Smith will have success facing a Rams defense that is down a staggering 10 defensive backs. Frank Gore is in line for a big game, which will loosen up the Rams' decimated secondary even more for Smith, who has decent receiving targets in Vernon Davis and Michael Crabtree.

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