

CASE NFL

NFL WEEK 14

1. Bengals -2.5 hosting Texans (1 unit)

In a battle of two strong defensive teams, I'll back the Bengals, who have the better quarterback and are at home. The pointspread at a field goal or less, is enough to back them.

I like T.J. Yates. But he's the Texans' third-string quarterback and won't have his security blanket and top receiver Andre Johnson. I much prefer the Bengals' good-looking rookie Andy Dalton and his stellar group of young wide-outs headed by A.J. Green. The Texans have won six in a row to build up a two-game lead in the AFC South. The Bengals, on the other hand, can't afford a loss as they try to earn a wild-card spot. Cincinnati has played twice against Pittsburgh and once against Baltimore in its last four games. Houston is much improved defensively, but its defense isn't as physical as those two opponents.

The Texans are vulnerable in the secondary. They haven't faced a quarterback as good as Dalton during their last three road games having played the Jaguars, Buccaneers and Titans. I like the matchup of Green and Jerome Simpson against Houston cornerbacks Jason Allen and Kareem Jackson.

2. Vikings-Lions Over 46 (1 unit)

Two beat-up secondaries playing inside a fast track dome spells lots of points. That's the scenario in this matchup.

Tim Tebow passed for 200 yards and two touchdowns against the Vikings on the road last week inside a dome. It's scary to think what Matthew Stafford, Calvin Johnson and a real passing attack can do against Minnesota.

The Vikings can't defend the pass anymore minus their two best cornerbacks and top cover safety. Injuries have reduced the Vikings' secondary to second- and third-stringers at three of the four defensive backfield positions. In their last seven games, the Vikings have surrendered 18 touchdown passes while coming up with no interceptions. I expect Christian Ponder to start for Minnesota. It's a bonus if Adrian Peterson plays. But I'm fine with this total over if neither plays.

Joe Webb would be the Vikings' quarterback if Ponder can't play. He's very athletic and has the weapons to put up points against a Lions defense missing their best front-seven player in suspended tackle Ndamukong Suh and best defensive back, injured safety Louis Delmas.

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3. Giants +4 at Cowboys (1 unit)

Yes, the Giants have lost four in a row. But look at who they have played: 49ers, Eagles, Saints and Packers.

The Giants beat the Patriots in New England five weeks ago and should have defeated Green Bay this past Sunday.

Dallas has played an easier schedule having faced the Redskins, Bills, Seahawks, Rams and Cardinals. The Giants have the offense to pile up points on Dallas and the pass rushers to bother Tony Romo. Eli Manning is having his finest season. The Giants are dangerous when healthy and they got two key players back last week in running back Ahmad Bradshaw and linebacker Michael Boley.

This is the Giants' season. They can't afford a loss here. New York The Giants have defeated Dallas the past two seasons on the road. They are 5-2 SU and ATS in their last seven games versus the Cowboys.

Dallas is 2-6-1 ATS as a favorite this season. Going back to the past 16 times they've been chalk, the Cowboys are a miserable 3-12-1 ATS. They also are 5-14 ATS in their last 19 games played in December. The Giants are 23-9 when taking points.

4. Falcons -3 at Panthers (2 units)

The Falcons beat the Panthers, 31-17, in Week 6 and I see nothing changing in this matchup.

Carolina is more beat-up on defense. Besides having lost their best linebackers, the Panthers also are down run-stuffing defensive tackles Sione Fua and Terrell McClain, both of whom went down last week.

This makes the Panthers highly vulnerable to the rumbling of Michael Turner, who has ran for at least 100 yards in five of his last six games against the Panthers. He gashed the Panthers for 139 yards rushing and two touchdowns in the team's first meeting this season.

Matt Ryan should perform better with the emphasis on Turner, especially with rookie Julio Jones healthy and teaming up with Roddy White.

The Falcons intercepted Cam Newton three times in the first meeting and held him without a touchdown throw. The Falcons rank No. 3 in the NFL in run defense. They've allowed only one 100-yard rusher in the last 15 games.

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This is an off-surface for the Falcons, but they've covered 11 of their last 16 road games.

5. Titans +4 hosting Saints (1 unit)

This is a dangerous flat spot for the Saints. Following their bye, the Saints destroyed the Giants at home on a Monday night and then took care of the Lions also at home this past Sunday night.

But now the Saints have to travel for the first time in four weeks and play on grass for the first time since mid-October when they lost at Tampa Bay.

New Orleans ranks 27th in total defense and its offense isn't nearly as explosive away from its home dome, especially on a grass field. Drew Brees' completion percentage drops from 68 to 63 on the road and his passing yardage falls from 341 to 290.

In the Louisiana Superdome, the Saints have averaged 39.8 points in six home contests. In their last five road games, however, the Saints are averaging 23.4 points during regulation. New Orleans has failed to cover in eight of its last 11 road contests.

The Titans are 10-2-1 ATS in their last 13 meetings against NFC competition. The Titans already have covered against the three other NFC South Division teams this year, beating Carolina and Tampa Bay straight-up by a combined 33 points.

Tennessee's defense doesn't get much fanfare, but the Titans are allowing just 19.1 points per game, which is sixth-best in the NFL. The Titans are respectable versus the pass and can play ball control with a ground attack that is picking up steam.

Chris Johnson was the best running back in football two years ago. After a very slow start, caused in large part by a protracted holdout, he has come on strong rushing for 343 yards the past two weeks.

If the Titans pull the upset, they have a real shot at making the playoffs. It's something they are well aware of. The spot and opponent match up well for the underdog to get the money if not win the game outright.

6. Bills-Chargers Over 47 1/2 (1 unit)

The Chargers are healthy on offense. That makes them dangerous against bad defenses such as Buffalo, especially when playing in warm weather.

Philip Rivers has his three main receiving targets healthy for one of the rare times this season with Vincent Jackson, Antonio Gates and Malcom Floyd. The Chargers' offensive line also has gotten back some of their walking wounded with the return of starting

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guards Louis Vasquez and Tyronne Green.

The Chargers did not give up a sack this past Monday in destroying Jacksonville on the road, 38-14. The Jaguars don't rush the passer very well and their secondary is beat-up.

This sounds very much like the Bills, who also lack a pass rush and have lost several key defenders including cornerback Terrence McGee and possibly safety George Wilson. Given time, Rivers can pick apart the best of defenses. The Bills' defense gives up 25.3 points per game.

San Diego's defense is down from past years. The Chargers have surrendered at least 20 points to all but two opponents. Buffalo's offense has tallied off, but still has big-play capability and Chan Gailey has a good offensive mind.

The Bills are 6-0-1 to the over in their last seven road games and 9-1-1 to the over after not covering the week before.

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