

Lions plus 3 at Cowboys

Detroit is 3-0 for the first time since 1980 and it's not a fluke.

The Lions right now are who the Cowboys want to be. Detroit has one of the three best defensive fronts, arguably the top wide receiver in Calvin Johnson and an elite quarterback, Matthew Stafford.

Johnson leads the league in touchdown receptions with six despite going against quality cornerbacks Brandon Flowers and Aqib Talib. Stafford is averaging 313 yards passing. He has thrown 15 touchdowns and only been picked off three times in his last five games. Injuries have been the only thing that has kept him from greatness.

The youthful Lions probably should have lost last week at Minnesota. However, they overcame a 20-0 halftime deficit. Yes, some of that is on the Vikings and their terrible coaching. But the Lions also showed a lot of mental toughness coming from behind in a tough road setting against a desperate division foe.

The Lions pulled the game out just two minutes into overtime. So fatigue shouldn't factor especially this early in the season with a young team. Detroit is 8-1 ATS following a victory.

Dallas, meanwhile, is playing on a short week off an emotionally draining home win against Washington. The Cowboys were lucky to win that game. They are 1-6 ATS the past seven times they've been home chalk. The Cowboys lost and failed to cover in both games last year following their game against Washington.

Dallas is far more banged-up than Detroit. Tony Romo is dealing with assorted injuries, including a painful rib injury and a punctured lung. If the Cowboys didn't have a bye next week they might even sit Romo.

Romo isn't the only key Dallas skill position player hurt. Miles Austin is out with a hamstring injury and Dez Bryant is going to be a game-time decision as he's dealing with a lingering quad strain. Those are the

Cowboys' two best wide receivers by far. The rest of Dallas' wideouts can't be trusted to even know the plays. Romo isn't helped either by a porous offensive line.

Demarcus Ware is a monster pass rusher, but he alone can't hide Dallas' defensive backfield deficiencies, especially where 33-year-old Terence Newman is going to be no match for Johnson.

The Lions continue to make positive progress and statements this season. This will be another one.

Packers -12 hosting Broncos

The Packers have yet to play anything close to their "A" game yet are undefeated and a backdoor cover away from being 3-0 ATS.

Now the Packers, playing at Lambeau, draw a Denver team far worse than perceived.

At less than two touchdowns, the Packers will cover this spread.

Denver might get back some of its key injured defensive players, but still remain extremely weak on that side of the ball. Defensive improvement could come for the Broncos, but not at this early juncture of the season, especially with their key cogs having not played together.

Aaron Rodgers is playing at an MVP-level. His offense is even better than last year with a healthy Jermichael Finley and rookie Randall Cobb being an upgrade on declining veteran Donald Driver.

Ryan Grant is out for Green Bay, but that's actually a plus since James Starks is the better running back. The Packers don't lose anything in pass protection either with Starks being the full-time back.

The Broncos were pass-happy last year under Josh McDaniels. This year under conservative-minded John Fox they've become ground-oriented. The Broncos, though, don't run or pass well. Willis McGahee has become the main back. Knowshon Moreno is more talented, but is banged-up. McGahee is close to being a shot runner with little juice left. Moreno is still at less than 100 percent and is not a good inside runner. The Packers rank first in run defense giving up just 55 yards per game.

The Broncos' passing attack has regressed. Kyle Orton hasn't had a 200-yard passing game since Week 1. Green Bay's secondary has tightened up with star cornerback Tramon Williams back.

Denver is not nearly as explosive to keep up with Green Bay. This one gets ugly early in Green Bay's favor and stays that way.

Saints -6 1/2 at Jaguars

This is one matchup where you can get away with laying more than a field goal with New Orleans on the road on a grass field.

The Jaguars haven't been able to rush the passer the past three seasons and their secondary lacks top-notch covering skills. Jacksonville doesn't nearly have the defensive backfield depth to stay with all of Drew Brees' receiving targets.

Brees and the high-powered, multiple-weapon Saints attack is a huge step up for the Jaguars after having faced Tennessee, the Jets and Carolina.

The Jaguars have no ability to play from behind. Their hope is to keep things close by controlling the ball with Maurice Jones-Drew. He's the Jaguars' only weapon, though. Blaine Gabbert struggled, as expected, in his starting debut last week throwing for just 139 yards and fumbling four snaps. Nearly half of his passing yardage came on checkdowns.

The Saints are very aggressive with their blitzes behind ace defensive coordinator Gregg Williams. Expect a lot of mistakes and turnovers from Gabbert as he goes through the learning curve. He's already the third quarterback the Jaguars have used this season.

New Orleans has a solid history under Sean Payton of doing the job on the road against bad opponents. The Saints are 10-4 ATS the past 14 times they've met a foe with an under .500 mark at home.

Consequently, the Jaguars have failed to cover nine of the past 11 times they've played a team with a winning mark.

Falcons -4 1/2 at Seahawks

Seattle's defense isn't bad and the Seahawks have a strong home field, but they are not close to being in Atlanta's class even though the Falcons have started slow.

The Falcons are far more explosive than Seattle and will be helped playing on Field Turf.

The Falcons have yet to show they can match last year's 13-win season. But they still are a double-digit win team with huge edges at quarterback, running back and wide receiver.

The Seahawks are very bad, expansion bad. A narrow home victory last week against Arizona can't cover that up.

Seattle is averaging less than 215 yards per game - and that's having faced two easy opponents in San Francisco and Arizona.

The Falcons, on the other hand, had to play the Bears in Chicago, the Eagles and Tampa Bay on the road.

There's a huge talent gap here. The line is short because the Falcons aren't playing well. Expect that to change as the Falcons will be focused and won't be falling behind by double-digits like they have in all of their games so far.

The Falcons are much better when playing with a lead, which will be the case in this matchup.

Eagles -9 hosting 49ers

The teams have met during each of the past three years and the Eagles have won and covered every time with their average victory margin being by 10 points.

The Eagles are much improved this year from last season and they have a very favorable situation going in this matchup.

The 49ers are on the road a second straight week. This is an early start time for them. The Eagles are off an embarrassing blowout loss to the Giants, under heavy criticism for a slow start and Michael Vick is highly-motivated to show he still is capable of putting up a monster game without getting hurt.

The Eagles are 7-1 ATS the following week after suffering a double-digit home loss.

Vick is going to do a lot of damage to a 49ers' defense that is worse than perceived. San Francisco ranks 16th in pass defense. However, two of the 49ers' opponents were Cincinnati with rookie quarterback Andy Dalton and Seattle with the egregious Tarvaris Jackson. The 49ers were lit up for 345 yards and two touchdowns by Tony Romo in their other game. Romo put up those numbers despite missing 20 snaps because of a punctured lung.

The 49ers don't match up well to Vick. They are aggressive and willing to take chances on the back end. Vick destroys aggressive defenses. DeSean Jackson is in line for big plays, too, against this style. The way to control Vick is to play a lot of conservative zone and try to fool him with false reads. This isn't the 49ers' style.

I see Vick doing extremely well against this defense. The 49ers, of course, don't have the firepower to trade points with the Eagles. Their offense consists of Frank Gore running and Alex Smith looking to throw short passes to Vernon Davis. Gore is averaging only 2.5 yards per carry going against stacked defenses and is bothered now by an ankle injury.

The 49ers managed to eke out a win last Sunday against Cincinnati. Rarely do they follow a victory with a good performance going 1-6-1 ATS after winning.