

CASE NFL - Week 5

Eagles are 3 units. All others are 1 unit plays.

Eagles -2 at Bills

The Eagles are far from being a dream team. It has been more like a nightmare for the Eagles ending September with three losses in a row.

While the Eagles have been a huge disappointment, the Bills have been one of the major surprises.

Let's not get carried away, though.

Yes, the Eagles have weaknesses. Their offensive line remains a work in progress and their linebacking is below average. I have serious questions about Juan Castillo, their first-year defensive coordinator who had previously coached the offensive line.

But the Eagles are still not one, but two levels higher than Buffalo. The Bills are a very limited team that very well could have just one win instead of three. If that were the case, the line would be much higher.

The Bills don't have the talent or scheme to stop the Eagles. Buffalo has given up 89 points and 11 touchdowns in their past three games. Michael Vick is at his best on carpet. The Bills are extremely thin at cornerback and don't generate a pass rush. Vick has a boatload of weapons to take advantage.

The Eagles have 15 sacks. They can rush the passer and have excellent cornerback depth. The Bills' offensive line is way below average. Ryan Fitzpatrick has done a nice job of covering up this weakness by throwing quick, short, timing passes. The Eagles have the ballhawking corners, though, who can jump these routes while their star pass rushers - Jason Babin, Cullen Jenkins and Trent Cole - apply plenty of heat. The Bills have yet to face such a strong pass rushing opponent.

Nobody is underestimating the Bills now. They have a target on their heads. The Eagles will be fully focused knowing they actually would be in serious trouble if they fell to 1-4.

The talent gap, motivational edges and line value make the Eagles a strong play.

Steelers -3 hosting Titans

Things are looking bleak these days for the Steelers. Their defense is down James Harrison and Aaron Smith. Their offensive line is banged-up, Ben Roethlisberger has a sprained foot and Rashard Mendenhall may not play.

Early money has been on Tennessee driving this line down.

But now's the time to back the Steelers. This is a circle-the-wagons game for Pittsburgh and the proud Steelers will respond well at home.

Yes, the Steelers are down from last year. They still are tough, though. The Titans are improved, but not as good as their 3-1 record indicates.

The Titans can be passed on. Roethlisberger has more receiving weapons than he's ever had topped by elite deep threat Mike Wallace.

The Titans could manage just 17 points against a bad Denver defense and only 14 points versus Jacksonville, which can't rush the passer. Chris Johnson has yet to score a touchdown and Kenny Britt, the Titans' most talented wide receiver by far, is out for the season.

As for the Steelers' injuries, Isaac Redman is a more effective runner than Mendenhall and Harrison wasn't playing well following off-season surgery.

Vikings -2 1/2 hosting Cardinals

Are the Vikings just plain bad or unlucky? The answer is a combination of both.

The Vikings are indeed bad but they are not Indianapolis or St. Louis bad. They have playmakers on both sides of the ball.

Jared Allen, Minnesota's great pass rusher, has five sacks in his last two games. He can disrupt a still-out-of-rhythm Kevin Kolb especially on a fast home track.

Adrian Peterson is in the argument for best running back and Percy Harvin is a game-breaker. The Vikings rank third in rushing and fifth in run defense. The Cardinals, by contrast, rate 15th in each of those key categories.

The Vikings have led in all four of their games. They've blown three double-digit halftime leads. These leads came against San Diego, Tampa Bay and Detroit. The combined record of those teams is 10-2.

But the major part of this handicap is a fade against the Cardinals, who have lost 10 of their last 11 road matchups. The Cardinals are 3-8 ATS during this span. The pointspread is so low that the Cardinals just about have to win this game straight-up to cover.

This is Arizona's third road game in four weeks. It's an early start time, too, for the Cardinals.

The Vikings are due. Their track record in this spot is good. They are 8-3-1 ATS the past 12 times they've been home chalk.

Minnesota finally gets the right opponent at home to take its frustrations out on.

Buccaneers-49ers Under 41 1/2

Both teams have better defenses than offenses. Stop the 49ers' ground game and San Francisco has little chance of scoring. The Buccaneers rank 11th in run defense. They are particularly underrated in the defensive line.

The 49ers' offense isn't nearly as good as it looked last week against a work-in-progress Eagles defense that can't stop the run. Alex Smith has yet to show he's anything more than a game-manager. He doesn't have the skills to complete passes downfield.

When the 49ers last went up against a solid defense they were held to one touchdown and 13 points by Cincinnati two weeks ago. Tampa Bay shut out San Francisco, 21-0, last season.

I'm not impressed with Tampa's offense either. Josh Freeman showed great potential last year, but has regressed. The 49ers rank No. 7 in scoring defense holding foes to 18.8 points per game and rate fourth in rush defense.

This figures to be a huge flat spot, too, for the Buccaneers losing two days of practice having to travel cross-country after edging Indianapolis at home this past Monday night.

Raiders-Texans under 48 1/2

The Texans are perceived as having an explosive offense.

The truth is the Texans haven't been as explosive in the passing game and now are minus star wide receiver Andre Johnson. The Texans have averaged 248 yards passing when Johnson is in the lineup. They've averaged 216 yards passing during the 10 games he's missed in his career.

Statistically, Matt Schaub is having a quiet season. A big reason for this is the Texans have become much more ground-oriented. That's not going to change in this matchup.

The Raiders are a run-first team, too, despite having speedy wide receivers. This is really a matchup of Darren McFadden versus Arian Foster against two improved defenses. These are two great running backs. But they're up against improved defenses, especially Houston's. Foster also doesn't have much backup as both Ben Tate and Derrick Ward are injured.

The Texans, under ace defensive coordinator Wade Phillips, are holding foes to 17.5 points per game. That's the fourth-lowest total in the NFL. The Texans also rank in the top 10 defensively in total yards and passing yards.

The Raiders' strength is their punting and deep kickoffs. So it's likely the Texans will constantly be starting in bad field position.

Packers-Falcons Over 53

If we've learned anything this season it's that strong passing offenses are way ahead of defenses, especially those with coverage weaknesses.

The Packers are the highest-scoring team in the NFL averaging 37 points. Aaron Rodgers, and this is scary, is actually improved and has more dangerous weapons.

There is not a defense in the league that can keep the Packers' offense in check right now. The Falcons were lit up by Tarvaris Jackson last week. It's scary to think of the numbers Rodgers can put up. The Falcons were burned by Rodgers last year giving up 48 points at home in the title game. The Packers did that without Jermichael Finley, Randall Cobb and Ryan Grant.

Green Bay's potent attack is made even more dangerous playing on carpet. The Falcons aren't strong in coverage and their pass rush is overrated.

The Falcons, though, are going to put up their share of points. Matt Ryan is much better playing at home where he has completed 64.7 percent of his throws and has a 96.7 quarterback rating lifetime in the Georgia Dome.

The Falcons have increased their firepower, too, adding rookie Julio Jones, who is living up to high expectations. Missing star safety Nick Collins, the Packers have proven vulnerable on long passes. They are surrendering an average of 333.5 yards through the air. That's the second-worst mark in the NFL.