

TRASH TALK: THE REGULAR SEASON, AT LAST!

We made it the vast wasteland of baseball hell back to football season! Congratulations one and all, especially you baseball nuts cursing my heresy right now.

Titans-Stillers: Things kick off tonight with scribe's Stillers taking on masaccio's Titans, the Super Bowl winners against last year's winningest team. Gotta go with the Stillers, easy, in this, because I still haven't washed my hand since I shook Franco Harris' hand at Netroots Nation. Plus, Mike Tomlin did something really classy this off-season—he said, as a friend of Michael Vick's, he might have ordinarily considered pursuing him, but given Big Ben's drama in the off season, he didn't want to do anything to get in Big Ben's head. The Stillers are pretty much the team that won the Super Bowl, whereas the Titans have lost both Albert Haynesworth and Jim Schwartz. Plus, it's in Pittsburgh.

Irish-Wolverines: Yes, this college game merits discussion in the first pro Trash Talk of the year. When's the last time this game actually mattered? How long since it has it featured two undefeateds? There was an interesting stat on ESPN the other night—one of those insta-polls on which coach needed the win more, Charlie Weis or Rich Rod. The entire country, save two states, said Weis. One exception, of course, was MI. The other? WV, which appears to still be pouting. I gotta go with the Wolverines here, because if I gotta deal with game day traffic, then I sure as heck am owed a win. Go, um, Forcier!

USC-OSU: I might make the effort to muster some Big 10 jingoism over this game, to claim that OSU can stay with USC in the Horseshoe. But ... Navy?!?! So consider this the first opportunity of the year for bmaz to boast about how much

better the Pac 10 is than the Big 10.

Merriman-Tequila: I frankly had never heard of Ms. Tequila when this whole nightmare for Shawne Merriman came up (yeah, you guys know my problems with pop culture, I get it). But from what folks tell me, Ms. Tequila is as dopey as she sounds—which leads me to give Merriman’s side of the story serious consideration. But I had to include it here because (as some of you might remember from discussions of Brent Wilkes) it all went down in Poway, CA, where I graduated from high school. And, unless things have changed, Poway’s not the kind of town in which a homeowner’s dalliances with two and three women in one bed make national news. So I included this just to increase Poway’s shame.

There’s so much going on this weekend, I expect we’ll weigh in with more Trash on Saturday. So rather than picking games, why don’t we do a start-of-season prediction of Division winners, for an especially nice hubcap at the end of the year (maybe we’ll melt down all the hubcaps Phred won last year and turn them into one very very big hubcap)? Mine are:

NFC North: Da Bears. Yeah. I get that on paper both the Vikes and the Pack are much better than Chicago this year—frankly, pretty damn good teams all around. Yeah, I agree that Cutler is a punk. Call this a whimsical hunch that I will likely very much regret—say, by Sunday.

NFC South: I’ll pick the Falcons here, though I’d sure like to see Drew Brees have another great year with the Saints.

NFC East: It’s a wacky year in the NFC East, but I think the Gents are still the strongest team in the Division. Besides, isn’t there a rule that at least one Manning wins a Division?

NFC West: Jeebus, who cares? I mean, what are the chances that any team from the NFC West would ever be a factor at all in the post-season? On paper the Squawks are probably the strongest team, but they’ve got the worst travel schedule this year. So I’ll go with the sentimental choice of Mike Singletary’s Niners.

AFC North: Stillers. Whether Stillers or Ravens with the Division, the other will get one of the wildcards. I'm just going with the Stillers because I like Mike Tomlin that much.

AFC South: This will probably be a surprise division this year, with the Colts fading and the Titans losing some key personnel. So hell, if we're going to have a surprise, why not the Texans?

AFC East: Pats. Not because Brady's back. Not because they've loaded him up with even more guns on offense. And in spite of the fact that BillBel has ousted all of his defensive leaders. But because BillBel has followed up his 6th round steal of Brady, his 7th round Cassell pick, with his latest bottom-feeder (and, at this point, sole) QB back-up: undrafted Brian Hoyer. Not that going into the first game with a brand new knee and a total rookie back-up is a good thing, mind you. But it'll keep you amused.

AFC West: Looks like the Bolts are going to have more unhelpful drama this year, and BillBel has stacked the Bolts' Division opponents with some great defensive weapons. Still, the Bolts are so much better than all the rebuilding teams in their division, they should easily take it.