

TRASH: THEY MIGHT BE GIANTS

Was discussing the state of the NFL last night with Marcy, and the prevailing opinion was an unusual lack of particularly exciting or compelling story lines. A strange parity and blaah seems to have set in to the league that hardly ever suffers from that. So, guess what, screw it I'm going with baseball as the lead.

The rookies on the LCS big stage Texas Rangers had the mighty Yankees on the ropes last night and forgot to step on the beast's throat. Can't do that with the Yanks, and the Rangers paid the price by giving up five runs in the eighth and losing game one 6-5. The young Rangers needed to close out the opening win at home and failing to do so has got to be deflating and forfeits home field advantage. Not a good sign; the Evil Empire looks to be on the road to yet another World Series.

However, the biggest and most compelling sports story of the weekend by far is the battle of aces in game one of the NLCS. Halladay of the Phillies versus Lincicum and the Giants. Dayn Perry at Fox Sports is wondering if it is the best pitching matchup in postseason history. I dunno about that (and Perry seemed to forget about the Bob Gibson showdowns with Denny McClain and Mickey Lolich in the 1968 World Series and the Gibson-Jim Lonborg game seven matchup in the 1967 Series), but tonight's Doc v. Freak show is right on up there. Both are former Cy Young winners, Lincicum has two and Halladay will almost certainly win his second this year. All Roy Halladay has done is throw the second no-hitter in MLB playoff history (after throwing a perfect game during the regular season). And Lincicum, well some folks think his two hitter against the Braves the night after Halladay's no no was an even better pitching performance than Halladay's no hitter. This is going to be some must see baseball teevee.

On the college gridiron, there are a couple of important games that will separate wheat from chaff. The Arkansas Hogs at the Auburn Tigers is one of those games. The Hogs damn near beat Alabama and would be undefeated if they had; Auburn is undefeated at 6-0 but has not had to play a team like Bama or Arkansas yet. Auburn at home is the safe pick, but the Tigers' pass defense is weak and Ryan Mallett is very good; Hogs may pull off the road upset. Texas is not up to snuff this year, but should pose a solid test for the supposedly rejuvenated Nebraska Cornfuskens. Nebraska always looks "back" and then starts running into real teams in the late season conference schedule and gets exposed. Maybe not this time though, Taylor Martinez has the Huskers as solid as they have been in a very long time. Still, I dunno, this is a tossup. The Sweater Vests are at Camp Randall and the Badgers. If there is a football god out there, please let Wisconsin knock off OSU and spare the country another one of their poor showings in the BCS Championship game. Lastly, Ricki Stanzi and the Iowa Hawks visit Denard Robinson and the Wolverweenies in teh Big Haus. Both teams come in with only one loss; one will leave that way and in good shape, the other will fall to also ran status. Robinson is so exciting he may be able to overcome the Rich Rod fail factor. Maybe, but I don't think so. Ricki can play too and Kirk Ferentz can coach circles around Rich Rod; Hawks leave with a win.

As I said in the opening, the NFL just seems in the doldrums right now. Cowboys should be good but suck, they are so lame it is hardly even worth the while to root against them anymore. Rest of the NFC East is playing okay, but not great. Saints are just muddling along; they really lost some spark when Reggie Bush went out, although their problems were already apparent even before that. The Bears look like the class of the league so far, but they sure don't feel that good to me in the gut. The Packers have just been decimated by injuries; even though Rodgers looks to play after getting a mild concussion last week, Green Bay has real

problems. And the NFC West? Jeebus, the Cardinals are leading the division and have given up 50 more points than they have scored this year.

Doldrums in the AFC too. Pats seem okay on offense although not well balanced; defense is, um, spotty. Chargers have been an enigma so far; guess Norval must still be their coach. Chiefs have been a pleasant surprise, but they don't have the goods yet to keep it up. KC is building and sure looks to have a bright future in a year or two. The whole AFC South is 3-2, but none of them seem dominant. That leaves the Ravens, Stillers and Jets as, really, the class of the NFL at this point. All three have knock down and lock down defenses and more than competent offenses. You would have had to say the Ravens and Jets had the edge with Big Ben out, but now that he is back, that is not so clear. Gonna be a slugfest down the stretch among those three it looks like.

Dirty Birds at Iggles looks like a good game; would look like a *really* good game if Mike Vick were healthy and starting, but he is not. Kevin Kolb no match for Matty Ice. Ravens at Pats also looks interesting, but Ray Lewis and the boys can stop Brady and, well other than Welker it is not clear, a lot better than the Patsies can stop Ray Rice, Quan Boldin and Joe Flacco. Boldin does not make a ton of noise like the standard prima donna wide receivers in the league these days, but man is that guy a team leader in the clubhouse and on the field. He is what Ray Lewis is to a defense and that is the difference for the Ravens. Peytons at the Skins Sunday night could be a decent game. Or Manning may chew up the not quite Shanahan rebuilt Skins; I think that is a fair bet actually. And last, and despite the hype, maybe least is the Boys at the Vikes. Whoever loses this game is done and gets the fork them. They both suck, but it is in the Metrodome and that is tough, so the edge go to the Vikes. Oh yeah, some guy named Favre may actually start at QB for Minnesota. The increasingly cackling and tabloid like

sporting press seems to think this is news. It is not. He may be hurting and over the hill, but the dude always straps em on, laces em up and takes the field. He will again.

Honestly, I can't wait for Zenyatta and the Breeder's Cup; football is getting boring.