

LAKE EFFECT TRASH TALK

Whoo boy, there is a bit of snow that shuffled in to Buffalo recently. So, with the Kittehs over in Foxborough taking on the steamrolling Pats, Buffalo will be the "home team" in Detroit for their game against the Jets. And tickets will be free, which is a cool thing for fans in Motown. The Jets just stink and Buffalo ought be a little jacked up, so I'm taking the Wagon Circlers. But what about the Kittehs? The Bill Bel and Brady brigade are just flat out rolling and just signed a new/old battering ram, er running back, LeGarrette Blount to solidify their running game. The Lions might be slipping back into the penalty prone ways. Hard not to take the Pats here.

Other than Pats and Lions, the other truly big game is the Cards up at the Seasquawks. The Squawks are favored pretty heavily. The national press, especially all the chatterers on ESPN, seem fixated on the Cards being in trouble because Carson Palmer is done for the year and backup Drew Stanton is in charge at QB. But I don't think that is the worry, Stanton is competent, and the Cards were not exactly flashy even with Palmer. I think the problem is the running game, or actually lack thereof. The Cards get a little bit out of Andre Ellington, but really just don't have much of a ground game. I think against a still tough Seattle defense, in that noisy stadium, that will doom the Cards. The Dolphins at Broncos and Ravens at Saints will also have big implications for all four teams and their playoff chances.

It is really a weak schedule in the college ranks this week. Arguably the two best games are in the Pac-12. First up is Rich Rod and the Arizona Wildcats in Utah to face the Utes. As I said earlier in the year when ASU played Utah, the Utes are good, and especially so at home in Rice Stadium. Lot of people picking Utah, but I think the Cats will pull out a narrow win. The

other Pac-12 tilt of note is the yearly grudge match between USC and UCLA. The Bruins are favored at "home" in the Rose Bowl, but home field doesn't mean much with these two. Both Brett Hundley and Cody Kessler are having great seasons at QB. I think it is a tossup, maybe slight edge to the Trojans. The SEC seems to all be playing Eastern Podunk State this week, so who cares about them? Special shoutout for Scribe on the Lehigh and Lafayette game being played in Yankee Stadium. I rate it a tossup, because who knows what can happen when these two get together! Seriously though, this is the 150th meeting in this ancient rivalry, and the NYT has a great story about the history.

Really, that is about it for excitement. There are only the two top shelf games in the NFL, but they should be good ones. The announcement of a no-bill, the opposite of an indictment for you non-criminal lawyers, is likely to be announced from the St. Louis County prosecutor's office on Sunday, or so it seems to be shaping up to my eye. Officer Darren Wilson will skate for the homicide of Michael Brown, and all because prosecutor Bob McCulloch designed and ran a ridiculously out of the ordinary and craven grand jury designed to insure there was no indictment. Wilson figuratively chased a boy through the park and put a bullet in his heart. So today's music is an absolutely kick ass version of Doo Doo Doo Doo Doo (Heartbreaker) by the Stones from 1972. Rock on.

Update from emptywheel. Scribe actually wrote a great piece on the Lehigh/Lafayette game so I'm making an executive decision to share it with you all.

This is the weekend someone in the marketing department decided would be called "Rivalry Weekend". And, so it is. Even though BMAz says it's a lame weekend for college football, he's wrong again. Many of the greatest rivalries in the college game get played today. But there is one rivalry which stands apart from the others. Today, Lafayette College and Lehigh University

will play football against each other for the 150th time. That is more than any other pair of teams have played each other, anywhere, ever. This year The Game will take place at a neutral site. Yankee Stadium.

These are two smallish Eastern colleges with campuses about a dozen miles apart in two of the small, now post-industrial, cities of Pennsylvania. The schools are justly proud of their academics and the distinction of their graduates. You can look them up, but they routinely wind up near the top of the “highly competitive” categories.

Lehigh is a full-blown university awarding all sorts of degrees through the doctorate, but it came up as a school of engineering and the hard sciences. It was founded in the 19th century by the man in charge of the Lehigh Valley Railroad and located literally up the hill – Bethlehem’s South Mountain – from the main works and offices of the Bethlehem Steel Company. For generations there were many young men who, upon graduation, would go down the hill and into the offices of The Steel, to retire from there 40 or so years later. For the longest time, Lehigh’s teams were “the Engineers”. But, in recent years either they had an attack of the marketing department or a crisis of confidence and they wound up renaming themselves the “Mountain Hawks”.

Lafayette is an all-undergraduate college sited on College Hill, a bluff overlooking the city of Easton and the confluence of the Lehigh and Delaware rivers. Its professors actually teach students in classes. It was founded in the first part of the 19th century. Its graduates have been more catholic in their fields of accomplishment, though business and Wall Street are strongly represented. Since time out of mind, its teams have been called the “Leopards”. In the days before the No Fun League, college football was the game and Lafayette was a national powerhouse as well as innovators. They were consensus national champions in 1896, 1921 and 1926. That’s right. Three-time national

champions. In those old days, responding to the team from the University of Pennsylvania stealing their signals, Lafayette's team invented the huddle. And, after tiring of getting banged around, one of Lafayette's players invented the old leather football helmet. And in the late 40s when Texas' Jim Crow would have stopped their star running back, a former Tuskegee Airman, from playing, Lafayette told the Sun Bowl to keep their bowl bid.

The rivalry between these two colleges is and always has been intense even as they've gone from I-A to I-AA in football, I-A in other sports. If you haven't experienced it from the inside it's quite hard to describe. It extends from football through all other sports and into the work and social worlds. That whole "Roll Tide -War Eagle" bit has nothing on this. For many years, the intensity of the rivalry required The Game to be played twice – home and home – every year. Thus, today is the 150th time The Game has been played even though they only started playing in 1884. The energy behind the rivalry played out in stunts – can you build an egg launcher that can be smuggled into the game and will reach to the other side of the stadium? – violence – both were all-male schools until about 1970 and all that energy went into ... something – vandalism – once, some Lehigh students put their welding skills to work and removed the balls from a larger-than-life bronze of General Lafayette. (After that and some very professionally done repairs, all outdoor statuary was boxed over for most of November. Students often repainted the boxes to look like outhouses.)

Two schools where football players play more for the love of the game than anything else. Both schools are antipathetic toward athletic scholarships and there are no academic shortcuts. Hardly any of the players ever gets a look from the No Fun League, so today is the end of football for most of the seniors. Each school has long traditions, alumni who deeply love them and many reasons to be proud. Today is one more.

For me, Yankee Stadium is too far to travel, but I might be going to a sports bar where The Game will be on CBS Sports Network.

Raise a glass. This is what college football should be.