

ELI IS LEAVING, AND BOWL SEASON FOR REAL TRASH TALK

There has been a joke here at Emptywheel from longer than you can imagine. Good Eli versus Bad Eli. There has been so much of both. But Easy Eli Manning is, arguably, going into arguably his last game as a Giant, if not in the NFL, an incredibly important player in the NFL.

It seems there ought be a bit more reflection on that. Eli Manning was controversial when he entered the league. He will be as he leaves. The better question is whether he is a Hall of Famer, or not.

Easy Eli won Super Bowl victories, and Super Bowl MVP awards, over the GOAT, Tom Brady. Eli did that, and deserves credit for it. But, let us put things in perspective. Eli never played for Bill Bel. So, it is hard to compare him with Brady. Fun, but very hard.

But Eli, whether good or bad, has been a staple here. If this is Easy Eli's last game in the NFL, I, for one, will miss him.

Add them all up, and the Manning brothers still have two fewer rings than Tom Brady. But they have been ubiquitous seemingly forever. And remember that Eli's two rings came over no less than Brady, Bill Bel and the Pats themselves.

People have been discussing whether Eli gets in the HOF for a while already. Honestly, I'd say no, except than when he made it to the biggest stage in sports, twice, the Super Bowl, Eli Manning showed up in style, and then some. And flat pulled wild things out of his butt both times. If it was just once, then it would be hard to make the case. But twice, and the way he did it? I dunno, there is a case to be made there.

Easy Eli may have never been the flashiest QB,

not even the flashiest Manning QB, what with Peyton and Archie, but he had himself quite a career. And he did it all with a large dollop of quiet grace. In New York of all places. The time has come for the Giants to move on, but I have a feeling they are about to realize what good fortune and stability they enjoyed with Easy Eli for all those years.

Two titles, 210 straight starts, one Eli: How Manning conquered New York is a great piece from ESPN:

Eli Manning always drank beer on the team bus. It was a Broadway Joe kind of thing to do, and a fact that might run counter to an image Manning spent absolutely no time crafting. But win, lose or draw, Manning would find someone on the road to buy him a six-pack or 12-pack that he would carry to the back of the bus, on ice, and share with some veterans as they discussed the game on the ride to the airport.

Even then, Manning's consistency stunned his New York Giants teammates. "It was unbelievable," said Lawrence Tynes, the kicker who won two championships with the quarterback. "He had a guy in every f—ing stadium in the league to get him that beer."

Should Eli Manning make the Hall of Fame? As NFL experts putatively cast their votes, Manning will miss those bus rides as much as he will miss anything else after he dresses Sunday for the final time as a Giant, and likely for the final time as an NFL player. Easy Eli. Say what you will, but the man made 15 years in the hot bed of NYC look, well,easy. That is something.

He will not miss the constant dissection of his public personality, or lack thereof, and the fascination with what has been a near-perfect marriage between the world's loudest marketplace

and a quiet child of the South who spent his career projecting that oblivious vibe he wore as clearly as his jersey No. 10.

Eli is leaving. Adios Easy Eli. He made it easy living when it it was almost impossible to do so.

Ahem, the two BCS games are tonight. There are all kinds of "bowl" games on the last few days, mostly because ESPN demands content. But, tonight, the real deal starts. First, Oklahoma takes on LSU in the Peach Bowl in Hot Lanta. The Boomer Sooners are pretty good. Have a hard time seeing them overcoming the Tiger's defense, much less the offense run by Joe Burrow. And that is not to sell Linc Riley short, he is young, hot on market and really good. Riley has coached the Sooners up, and they are really good.

But the second is right here in Phoenix in the Fiesta Bowl, and that is Clemson versus Ohio State. Thought about going, but it is a seriously long haul from here to the stadium. So, the TV will have to suffice. Both teams are undefeated at 13-0, and it is not easy to say which is greater or lesser. But Clemson is the reigning national champ, and has still gone undefeated so far this year. The Tigers also beat OSU in a similar CFB semi-final game in the Fiesta Bowl in 2016. Think tonight's game will be far closer, but sleep on Clemson at your own risk.

In the Pros, few games are overly exciting. Jets at Buffalo looks boring, but the Jets Jets Jets, once they got Sam Darnold back have been better than you think. I'll still take the Wagon Circlers, but expect a good game. Scribe's Steelers at the Ravens, who are sitting all their key players, is another one to watch. Not sure how far the Stillers can go with Duck Duck Go Hodges, but would very much like to see. Titans at Texans is a huge game. Against better judgment, think BOB, the Texans, and Watson are on a real roll, so there you go. Similarly difficult call, but think the Iggles roll the Giants. The Rams are toast. The Cardinals still

playing to show that they have a promising future. Right now, the Rams still have a clearly better team. Does it translate to a win at the end of the season? That is a lot better question, and I have no clue, and thus rate it a curious tossup.

There you go folks. Say goodbye to Easy Eli. And enjoy the college semi-finals and the last week of the NFL.

Happy Holidays, and Happy New year, from all of us here at Emptywheel. We truly truly love you, and thank you.