

TURKEY DAY FOOTBALL TRASH TALK

Here it is already, Thanksgiving. This will likely be my only shot to tell you folks thank you, and so I do. Each and every one of you who have the passion, and take the time out of your lives to spend some of it here at Emptywheel.

Thank you.

Football on Thanksgiving is a tradition going back further than even pro football:

Football games, being played on Thanksgiving Day, date back to 1876. When Yale and Princeton began an annual tradition of playing each other on Thanksgiving Day. The University of Michigan also made it a tradition to play annual Thanksgiving games, holding 19 such games from 1885 to 1905. The Thanksgiving Day games between Michigan and the Chicago Maroons in the 1890s have been cited as “The Beginning of Thanksgiving Day Football.

But the tradition with the Detroit Lions started in 1934 when a chap by the name of George A. Richards bought the Portsmouth, Ohio football team known as the Lions and moved them to Detroit to join the still fledgling NFL:

As a marketing ploy to drum up attendance at the new team’s games, then Lions’ owner, George A. Richards, arranged for the team to host the Chicago Bears in the University of Detroit Stadium on Thanksgiving Day. Richards also arranged for the game to be televised nationally via NBC.

In spite of the fact the Lions lost that first Thanksgiving-Day game to the Bears, the holiday game was such a success that Detroit continues to host

it to this day; the Thanksgiving Day game in 2012 will mark the Lions' 73rd. For the first five years, the Chicago Bears provided the competition to the Lions on Turkey Day. In the 1950s and 60s, Green Bay was the team that gave the Lions their holiday match. Over the years, however, the Lions have played most of the teams in the league on one Thanksgiving Day or another.

And this year the triple header of NFL Thanksgiving games starts out with the original, the home game in Detroit. Today the Kittens host the mighty Houston Texans. The Texans come in 9-1 and still appear to be the leagues most consistently solid team. So far the injury bug that decimated them in prior years has stayed away. Last week the Texans looked dead in the water and in line for an upset at the hands of the Jaguars. But behind a furious comeback fueled by Matt Schaub and the supposedly hobbled Andre Johnson in his twilight years, the Texans pulled out a 43-37 overtime win. Schaub ended up with 5 TDs and 527 yards passing (second most in history) while Johnson turned in a career receiving game with 14 receptions and 273 yards (most since the start of the millennium). Oh, and the Texans' defense is good too, although All-Pro CB Jonathan Joseph is questionable.

The Lions have had a mostly forgettable season so far, but have been in almost all of their games. You get the feeling they may break out one of these games and flatten somebody. The question, as always with the Jim Schwartz coached Kittens, is their mental condition and discipline. There do not seem to be any new names on the Docket Report, but they have suspended number two receiver Titus Young for undisclosed conduct unbecoming. It is always something. They may also be without critical left tackle Jeff Backus due to a hamstring injury; if so, it will be the first game he has missed in the last 186 games. Even if Backus plays, he will be hobbled. That is going to be a

problem for both the passing game and running game (such as it may be with the Lions), and it is hard to see how that is not a cruncher against a team like the Texans.

The Dallas Cowboys did not start playing Thanksgiving day games until 1966, but they have played a home game on Turkey day every year since with the exception of 1975 and 1977. They are now as much a Turkey tradition as Detroit. Today the 'Boys have a great one as the hated Washington Redskins come to town. That means RGIII baybee! Maybe the most exciting player in the league at this point. Dallas has righted the ship at 5-5 and, shockingly, are within one game of the NFC East lead as the Giants have faltered to 6-4. But the running game is hurting with Demarco Murray likely out and Felix Jones banged up. On a positive note, Dez Bryant might be starting to mature a little and Miles Austin is starting to show up again, so look for the Cowboys to go early and often to the pass. Washington's defense is hurting. Brian Orakpo and Adam Carriker were already out, and now safety Brandon Meriweather is done for the year and London Fletcher hurting. This looks on paper like a Dallas win, but then there is the RGIII factor. I still think Dallas wins.

The third and final game today is Pats at Jets. Honestly it is hard to get too geeked up over this game. New England is starting to click and the Jets, while hanging around, always seem to be on the verge of completely imploding. You have to wonder how long they can stick with Rex Ryan as coach, but owner Johnson may be an even bigger problem. The Jets are a mess. And the Pats have lost the Gronk to a broken arm. My guess is he won't really be out six weeks, but he sure will be for a few. And that hurts. Aqib Talib in his Patriots debut made a definite mark, the Pats D is already better. Maybe the Jets pull off an upset, but it is hard to see how. Pats roll.

There is a college game tonight as well with TCU going to visit the Whorens of Texas. There are

some decent games on the tube Black Friday, and provide a great reason to stay out of the teeming public masses. Nebraska at Iowa and LSU at Arkansas are both decent games. They may look like walkovers, but the underdog is at home in both, so they may be pretty interesting. But the real fun comes in the form of two historic rivalry games in the PAC. First up is Washington at Washington State. The Cougars have really disappointed under new coach Rick Leach, but anything goes in the Apple Cup.

Better yet is the Territorial Cup game between ASU and Arizona. Let me tell you, these schools HATE each other. And while neither team is ranked this year, they have both shown moments of explosiveness and it is one rivalry game that almost always is worth watching. this year the game is down in Tucson, so I won't be going. I have to say, Rich Rodriguez has been a breath of fresh air for the Wildcats after the Mike Stoops doldrums. ASU also has a new coach, Todd Graham that is making consistent progress in toughening up the Devils and bringing some discipline. I have no idea which way this game will go this year, it is impossible to read. It is the Friday night game on ESPN and is well worth the watch.

That is it for the Turkey day games. Have a great Thanksgiving people and join in the comments for some fun. The music today is from an awesome band called Vintage Trouble. They are a modern band that is dedicated to creating a mid-century soul/juke joint sound, and man do they deliver. Check out some of their other tunes too, they are smokin. Otis Redding would be proud.

As a parting shot, if you are a fan of the Princess Bride, check out the NFL on ESPN version.

Rip this joint!