

# SUPER BOWL LIV: WHO WILL PARTY WITH THE LOMBARDI

Super Bowl Sunday this year is a special day? How so you ask?

How's this for [a calendrical trifecta](#): Sunday is Super Bowl Sunday. And it's Groundhog Day. And it's a rare eight-digit palindrome when written as 02/02/2020 – the only one of its kind this century.

A palindrome, as you might know, is a sequence that reads the same forward as it does backward.

Apparently the only palindrome in recent memory. But also Groundhog Day too (when will that inanity give way)? If you want to add some other calendar stuff on, 2020 is also a leap year.

We will get to the last NFL game of the season in a minute, but first a couple of quick things.

First, in the middle of the night last night, there was [a stunning Women's Final in the Australian Open](#). Barely 21 year old American Sophia Kenin, who slayed media darling Coco Gauff in the fourth round, and then world number one Ash Barty in the semi-finals, in straight sets, was also victorious over two time Grand Slam champion Garbine Muguruza. And she did it with quite a bit of aplomb. Lost the first set, and then took over. Kenin may be around a while, get used to the name. And, if you can catch a replay of the match, do it. The announcers universally thought a star was being born, and they might well be right. It was something.

While Kenin was a breath of fresh air early this morning (the Aussies are in a far different time zone), last night was the first Lakers game after the tragic death of Kobe Bryant, his daughter Gigi, John Altobelli, Keri Altobelli

and Alyssa Altobelli, Christina Mauser, Sarah Chester and Payton Chester and pilot Ara Zobayan. The Staples Center was purple and blue, and, given the obvious emotional difficulty, it was all beautiful. [LA and the Lakers got it right](#). The videos are out there, take a look. The tributes, music, and sometimes combination (the cello guy during the video tribute was spectacular).

Okay, on to the Super Bowl we go. There are, as always, a lot of weird "proposition bets". I don't really get into that, but [here are a bunch of, um, interesting ones](#). The current overall Vegas line is vacillating between 1 – 1.5 points, with that historically slim line in favor of Kansas City.

So, what's the deal? Lol, I dunno. But, in the long run, balance and defense wins. KC has the more explosive offense, but that is partially because they have had to rely on it, and Mahomes, so often to climb out of holes. On the other hand, they have been able to do so, and especially impressively so in the playoffs. The 49ers are different though. The SF defense starts with that they basically only rush the front four to create the havoc they do. Nick Bosa, Dee Ford, DeForest Buckner and Arik Armstead are relentless and really good. and with Richard Sherman and Mosely patrolling the secondary, the Niners are extremely solid.

The Chiefs, however, while having a winning defense are nowhere near as consistently solid as SF. Frank Clark is not a beloved character in the NFL, but he is extremely good as a pressure point. Chris Jones and Tyrann Mathieu are first team all pro worthy types in the secondary. Honeybadger was here in Arizona his first few years and, when healthy, which he is now, he is a big play game changer of special talent. And as good of a player as he really is, he has grown up to be an even better person. [This is a great piece in the WaPo on Tyrann:](#)

For all the new plans and pieces, Kansas City's defensive transformation began

with the player teammates still love to call the Honey Badger. Mathieu is a storm of calculated mayhem, a worker bee who wakes up at 5:45 each morning and a heat-seeking missile who can line up or strike from anywhere on the field. He has changed the Chiefs in elemental ways with his all-pro performance and his mere presence.

“He’s a special person,” Chiefs General Manager Brett Veach said. “It’s really hard to explain the power someone like that has unless you’re actually in the building. . . . You have to get talent. You have to build a deep roster. You need corners, and you need rushers. Until you get a catalyst, it’s hard. You need that one guy that will make everything go. He’s certainly that guy. To have him on our team has meant everything to us.”

Again, what do I think? First off, what I think is beyond irrelevant anywhere but here. Secondly, I am a dope. So, given those caveats, here we go. Honeybadger can sit and snipe on Jimmy G enough, or the Niners O-Line gives Jimmy G the time that San Francisco’s D-Line does not afford Mahomes. I have no real idea, but with betting no real money, I think...think...The balance on the Niners is better and wins. No, I do not feel good about that pick.

As a parting note, today’s music is Heart playing Stairway To Heaven at the Kennedy Center for the remaining members of Zep, assorted dignitaries and President and First Lady Barack and Michelle Obama. To say it is stunning is a gigantic understatement. I had never seen it before last night, when I stumbled on it by accident. WOW. Shared it with numerous friends and the universal reaction was still WOW. It is that good, especially when the choir/chorale kicks in. It is soooo good. Check it out. I was almost lifetime tired of Stairway to Heaven before I saw this, and was immediately

mesmerized. Yeah, it is that incredible. And if you want full screen, just click to embiggen it.

Rock and roll, and enjoy the Super Bowl!

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## CHAMPIONSHIP SUNDAY TRASH TALK

Last Sunday of football before the Super Bowl, so only two games today. We'll get to those in a minute, but since there are only two, I thought I'd throw a couple of other topics out for discussion too.

You'd think the Trump impeachment would be the biggest news for the weekend, but it got a serious run for its money from the Royal split-up. Harry and Meghan are out, and not out in some kind of hybrid duty arrangement, but just out. They will still be the Duke and Duchess of Sussex, but no longer possess any "Royal Highness designations (seems kind of like a distinction without difference, but the Brits seem to take it seriously), and will do no more official work at all for the queen. They will no longer get money from the Royal Trust or whatever, but that was very little of their funding anyway and will still get from whatever personal trust Prince Charles doles out, which is apparently a lot. And will earn some of their own too, how is unclear. And they will maintain possession of their UK home Frogmoor Cottage (apparently one hell of a "cottage" but will have to repay some money that went to renovation of it recently. And, maybe most notable, they intend to spend a lot of time in North America, sounds like British Columbia is the likely place for that, which also puts them in easy reach of Los Angeles, San Francisco and Seattle. I don't really have too much interest in all this, but a stunning amount of people do it turns out.

Second is, of course, impeachment. The House Impeachment Managers filed their brief yesterday afternoon, [and it is here](#). It is over 100 pages and is extremely well done, supported and argued. That is the House's main trial brief. Team Trump made a filing yesterday as well, but it is only a six page boatload of stupid that veers into ludicrous and awful. [It is here, and reads like Trump himself authored a lot of it](#). And it is really only an answer to the impeachment articles summons. The Trump trial brief will be much longer, and is due tomorrow, so yesterday's filing is NOT their final word before the proceedings begin.

Okay you can also talk about anything else you want of course, but enough of the other stuff, let's get to the football.

First up is the Titans at Chiefs. The Titans are simply a better team than people think, and they caught lightning down the last half of the regular season and playoffs. Derrick Henry is just a beast, but I expect KC's defense to try and contain him and make Ryan Tannehill beat them. Tannehill has played well enough in their first two playoff games, throwing for TD's, but not throwing often, and not for many yards (as in 160 yards combined over this two wins). He is going to have to do a lot more today, because Pat Mahomes looks back to full speed and Jesus can he and KC's offense put up a lot of points in a hurry. Odds started out plus 10 in favor of the Chiefs, but are down to 7 now. Sounds about right.

The second game is the rejuvenated Packers at Santa Clara to visit the 49ers. Green Bay is a lot better team than the one that got absolutely smoked 37-8 there earlier in the year. I think the Pack defense can do some things against Jimmy Garropolo and the Niners, but they better watch out for those quick hitters in the middle, and that is not the best part of the GB defense. That is a problem. Packers offense is much improved as of late, especially with Devante Adams back at full speed. But the rest of the

receiving core is not exactly going to light anybody up with the possible exception of Aaron Jones out of the backfield. And that is a problem. Rookie Nick Bosa is just a freak for the Niners' defense, he is seriously good, and Dee Ford is back from injury and a handful too. And then there is always Richard Sherman in the secondary, and he always comes to play in big games. Packers O-Line has been playing fairly well, but they are fragile as to in game injuries. They will have to be great today. Current line favors the Niners by 7.5, and that sounds about right too. If this game was at Lambeau on the Frozen Tundra, I would be very tempted to take them in an upset. But not in the Niners' crib.

Since the Royals are all over the news, today's music is The Royal Scam by Steely Dan. Tilt a pint or two and have some fun.

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## **COLLEGE FOOTBALL CHAMPIONSHIP MONDAY**

Monday is the fun day this extended football week. I intentionally did not put this in the Division Weekend post. Oh, and as to that, as usual, my off the cuff picks were not, shall we say, exactly right. You get what you pay for. Niners won as expected. Cool! But the Titans totally clocked the Quoth the Ravens. Did not see that coming! Chefs looked moribund and cooked, and then went on a roll like I have never seen before. Goofy, but got that right. I really thought the Squawks would upset the Pack. But Lambeau and Rodgers held on. That was my upset special, and, boy, was I wrong.

Enough of those bygones, tonight is the, at long last, college championship. LSU and Clemson.

Both 14-0. Hard to see how either could be more impressive at this point. Clemson has not lost a game in two years. That would be 29 games in a row. That is stupid good. And they are not only defending champions, Clemson has won it all two of the last three years. And did so on the back of Nick Saban and the winners of the world (thanks Steely Dan!) Nick Saban's Crimson Tide.

So, coming in undefeated, after an undefeated championship year last year, makes the Clemson Tigers the absolute favorite, right? Nope. The "other" Tigers, the ones from LSU are unquestionably the favorite. LSU's QB, Joe Burrow, won the Heisman Trophy. And he deserved it and by the biggest margin in history, which he got. If both came out for this spring's draft, who goes first? A year ago it would have been unconscionable to say anybody but Clemson's Trevor Lawrence. Not now, the Bengals will be taking Joe Burrow at number one.

So, what's up tonight? Yeah, I dunno. Some of the newer people here seem to be slow learning that my picks are nominally common sense and mostly follow standard logic and odds. And that I rarely gamble with my own money. I still have a house, because I have never bet it.

Sooooo.....Tonight! The Tim McGraw song ESPN opened their coverage with was pretty damn good. As a red blooded gut, nowhere near his wife, [Faith Hill's, SNF opener](#). Sorry folks, that one from nearly ten years ago seriously rocked.

As to the game. The right two teams are clearly playing. LSU seems, qualitatively, the much better team. But how Ohio State ever got seeded ahead of undefeated defending champs Clemson is seriously insane. To the point of being a joke. People like to make fun of the diminished relevance of the PAC-12, but the Big-10 has been overrated bullshit since I was a kid and any random 7-3 PAC champion regularly kicked Bo and Woody's ass in the Rose Bowl. But, wait, I digress....

Tonight LSU is favored, and they should be. Joe

Burrow is the real deal. Trevor Lawrence is too, but, wow, Burrow has been insanely good. Both can throw. Both can run too. Both defenses are really good. Dabo Swinney has the hardware. But how can you not simply love the Ragin Cajun Ed Oregon?

I have no prediction, just hope for a game that can live up to the moment as potentially one of the best ever.

It all rolls in Nola, and let there be good times rolling. So, some gumbo music from an old friend Janiva Magness (one of the finest blues singers you have never heard of) playing zydeco with her Louisiana pal Tab Benoit (who is fucking great by the way).

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## NFL DIVISIONAL PLAYOFF WEEKEND

The wildcards have been played, and resulted in a couple of surprises. The Vikes took out the heavily favored Saints in Nawlins, and the Titans took out the Pats in Foxborough. The latter less shocking given how well the Titans played closing out the regular season and how poorly the Pats did.

But now we head into the Divisional rounds. I found [this from PFT](#) kind of interesting:

In 1990, the NFL expanded the playoff field from 10 to 12 teams, resulting in four (not two) teams earning a bye. More often than not, the home team that has had a week off wins. But the road teams still have a chance to get lucky.

For the 29 postseasons since the change was made, the home teams have swept the divisional round eight times. That's 27.5 percent of the years utilizing the



12-team format. So in 72.5 percent of the years since the current formula was adopted, at least one road team has won in the divisional round.

Specifically, 13 times the home teams have gone 3-1 in the divisional round. Seven times, there has been a split. Once, in 2008, the visiting teams won three of the four games.

In the 10 seasons from 2005 through 2014, the road teams had a remarkably good stretch, winning 16 of 40 games (40 percent). Over the past four postseasons, however, the home teams have gone 13-3 collectively.

All four home teams are favored to win this weekend, as they usually are. In the 30th year of the current format, chances are at least one will lose. One of these years, all four will.

Regardless, the home teams are more likely to feel the pressure. Some could be feeling a little rusty. And one lucky punch early in the contest could turn a potential blowout into a close game, and if the game stays close into the fourth quarter, anything can happen.

If there is an upset of a home team, which game or games will it be in?

The first game up today is Minnesota at San Francisco. Obviously the Niners have the top seed in addition to home field today. The Vikes looked extremely good against the Saints. Their defense is really solid, and Kirk Cousins playing very well. Dalvin Cook gives them a well balanced offense, and SF is likely to focus on Cook and make Cousins try to beat them. Can they do that? It may be easier said than done given that Minnesota's O-Line is good. There is certainly upset potential here, and there is history from the 1988 game where the Vikings bounced the heavily favored 13-3 Niners in SF in

the Divisional round. It could happen again, but not betting on it.

The second Saturday game is Tennessee at Baltimore. The Titans are on a pretty solid roll ever since they switched from Mariotta to Ryan Tannehill at QB. They are a good team, especially when Derrick Henry gets untracked. But not predicting an upset of the Ravens today.

First up Sunday is Houston at the KC Chiefs. Up to six inches of snow is expected in KC today, although should be well over by tomorrow's kickoff. Ground crew gonna be busy, and there are heating coils under the field, so they should be good to go. Frankly, I have a hard time seeing the Houston offense keep up with Pat Mahomes and the Chiefs. And with Honey Badger Mathieu now on the Chiefs instead of the Texans, decent bet he has given some advice to KC as to how to defend Deshaun Watson.

The final game of the weekend is the Squawks at the Cheeser's. The Pack is my favorite team going back to childhood, and my trusty cheesehead that Phred gave me is out and ready to roll. The Packers' defense is sneaky good, with free agent pickups Preston Smith and Za'Darius Smith really anchoring the D-Line, with the always good secondary still there. Seattle is no longer really the Legion of Boom it once was, but they are still very solid. So the outcome probably turns on who has the better offense, and who plays better, Russell Wilson or Aaron Rodgers. The Frozen Tundra is going to be cold as ice, and the Packers have already put out a call for people to show up at 6 am Sunday to help shoveling out the stadium. This is the kind of game Beast Mode is made for, and Russ Wilson too. As much as I hate to say it, I fear this is the real upset special of the weekend, and I think the Squawks likely do just that.

Okay, rock and roll, and have a great weekend full of great football. Speaking of rock and roll, this weekend's music is a fantastic little piece, Slippin and Sliding, by John Lennon. People forget how good Lennon really was at

rockers. Give it a listen, and crank it up.

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## THE JOKER IS WILDCARD WEEKEND

The college football championship between Clemson and LSU is still over a week away. And, after all, those are truly the two best teams that should be playing, so it will be as is should. Never sleep on Clemson, but LSU seems currently on a different level.

Beyond that, it is the Wildcard Weekend. And how that is going to go is a far better question. And that is the trash for this fine weekend.

First up is Buffalo at Houston. Both come in 10-6. In a way, they are almost mirror images even beyond their records. How much can JJ Watt contribute? Josh Allen and Deshaun Watson were both early first round picks expected to get their teams here, and they have. Watson has the flair to date, but don't sleep on Allen, he is growing into a very good QB, something the Wagon Circlers have not had since Jim Kelly. The game is in Houston, and home field is always a plus, especially in the playoffs, except the last World Series in baseball. But this is the NFL, and home field counts. Will Fuller seems to be out for the Texans, which means the Bills can pay more attention to DeAndre Hopkins, which limits Watson and O'Brien's offense. Probably gonna regret this, but I think that gives the Bills the edge.

Next, of course, is the Titans at Foxborough and the Pats. Chance of rain and 46° by what is reported. Home field, again, and the weather favor the Pats. But the Titans have, despite their record compared to the Pats, looked like a far better team down the stretch. Ryan Tannehill has been fantastic for them, and Derrick Henry

beyond that. Tennessee is really good. There is not a chance in hell I will bet real money against Bill Bel and Brady, but if I were up in Vegas, I just might. This will be a really interesting game, and likely the most interesting and consequential one of the weekend.

On to Sunday. Early game is Minnesota at Nawlins. That miracle reception is not going to happen again. Drew is going to breeze this one. In the month of December, after coming back from injury, Brees threw for 15 touchdowns and no interceptions. That is pretty good. Kirk Cousins has always been better than people let on, but hard to see it here against a Saints' defense that is as good as it has been in a very long time.

Last up is Squawks at Eagles. Carson Went is good. And he is healthy. No reason not to think he will get the Iggles back to the Super Bowl that Nick Foles got them to, and won. Philly has solid coaching, and know how it is done. But....the Squawks are mad. They think they should have won that last game against the Niners, and they may not be wrong about that. Seattle's running attack is basically a rookie named Travis Homer, who is out of the U and actually is pretty promising, and a couple of scrubs picked up a week ago off the street. But one of those scrubs is Beast Mode, and he is back, and has unfinished business. The Squawk's running game may be a tad patchwork, but, hey, Beast Mode had a warmup week and is ready to roll. Also, too, they have Russell Wilson. Went and the Eagles will be back in the playoffs, just maybe not next week.

So there is your wildcard weekend. Music by Steve Miller, because Rosalind. But the even older Sinatra cut had to be included too. Welcome to the New Year folks, thank you for being here, and let's have a good one.

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# 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 to 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 that 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.

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## **YAKETY YAK TRASH**

Okay, I have another project I need to get back to, so this will be yet another truncated trash talk. There is not a lot on the college bowl calendar today. Boise State and Washington in the Las Vegas Bowl looks interesting. It is apparently Chris Peterson's last game as coach of the Huskies, and he was previously the head coach at Boise State. So there is a dynamic thing going on there that really makes it interesting. The Broncos have quietly had a very good 12-1 year and come in ranked number 19, while the Huskies are unranked and 7-5. Game is on ABC broadcast. The other fun looking game is Appalachian State and UAB in the New Orleans Bowl, which is the late game on ESPN. The Mountaineers are always fun to watch, and come in, like Boise State, with a quietly great 12-1 record and a number 20 ranking.

In the Pros, there was no Thursday Night game because there is a late season Saturday slate. First up is Houston at Tampa Bay. The Texans are clear favorites, but the Bucs have been different lately. Winston is still a one man



turnover machine, but the team is playing a lot better. Bruce Arians may seem like like your friendly, even is found mouthed grandfather, but the dude can seriously coach them up. Houston better pay attention today.

Next up is Buffalo at the Pats. Brady and the boys just cannot get untracked on offense this year. Brady is finally starting to age, and other than Edelman, he does not trust his receivers. The O-Line has been okay, but not great yet. And I think people did not understand what a loss James Develin really was. The Bills are not flashy on offense but have been getting the job done all year. Both teams have excellent defenses and know how to play ill the cold. This thing is in Foxborough, but still seems like a tossup to me. The Bills have come a long way, and you have to like what they are doing. The last game of the day is Rams at Niners. The Rams have been truly flaky recently. No way to know which team will show up for them, but I will take the Niners at home.

On Sunday, Nawlins at Tennessee seems important. The Saints have clinched a solid playoff spot, the Titans are still fighting. The obvious biggest game is Dallas at Philly. The winner will likely wing the moribund NFC East and move into the playoffs, the loser likely goes home. Both teams are 7-7, and both teams can lay eggs at any given moment. I dunno, but the game is in Philly so I will give the Iggles a slight nod. That said, Dan Prescott has been arguable more consistent than Carson Went this year.

If you don't live in either Phoenix or Seattle, you probably don't know that the Cardinals have given the Squawks hell in Seattle, one of the toughest stadiums to play in in the league. You'd be crazy to pick against Seattle tomorrows, but Kyler Murray versus Russell Wilson could be a hell of lot of fun. Packers at Vikes is the MNF game, and that looks be be fantastic. Pack are 11-3, Vikes 10-4 and at home. For all the early grousing about him, Kirk Cousins has had a seriously good year. Aaron

Rodgers a decent one....unless your name is Aaron Rodgers. This is a total tossup, and I cannot wait for it.

Okay, todays music is by Boots Randolph, and yeah, it is the famous Yakety Sax. More people may recognize this from Benny Hill and other comedy skits, but it is a real thing, and the sax work really incredible. Happy holidays to one and all.

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## THE BLACK HOLE

The only college game that counts today is Army/Navy. It is an age old tradition, and for good reason. Also, it annually takes place in the land of cheesesteaks, so that is fun too. Kind of hilariously, CNN is hyping it as hard, if not more, than CBS who is actually carrying the game. Today is the 120th matchup.

It is an interesting year. Last year, Navy had a horrible year, and Army finished 11-2 with their third straight win over Navy. 2019 was an about face though, as Navy comes into today at 9-2 while Army has struggled to a 5-7 record. Of course in a rivalry game like this, none of that matters, they play for pride. Navy is the clear favorite, and looks good to me. GO NAVY! I'd talk about the Heisman announcement, but if Joe Burrow is not the unanimous choice, it will be a travesty.

Sunday, however, will bring down the curtain on a different tradition. The Black Hole. Long before the Patriots of Bob Kraft and Bill Bel became the most hated and arrogant team in the NFL, there was the Just Win Baby Oakland Raiders. It would be fitting if the Pats were in Oakland tomorrow to close out the joint, instead it will be the mustached Minshew and the Jags. It is sad. And, I don't care how shiny the new and expensive Las Vegas football venue is, it

will never feel right.

The Raiders are Oakland, and were even when temporarily in LA. There is not enough space here to tell all the stories of Al Davis and the Raiders. But he had fantastic glasses, always, and huge balls. Davis not only took the NFL head on when they were still thought invincible, he had the guts to appoint the first woman to be an NFL CEO, Amy Trask, who served in that position from 1997 to 2013 after, literally, starting as an intern with the team. There is simply still no analog to that courage, short of Greg Popovich making Becky Hammon a key assistant coach on the Spurs.

So, here we are at the death knell of the Black Hole. [This Dana Jacobson piece, with Trask, almost perfectly encapsulates the Black Hole.](#) The denizens there are fucking nuts, and have been beautifully so. There will be a [beautiful shiny new stadium in Las Vegas](#). A lot of the fans will still show up there. But it will never have the pure grit of Al Davis and Oakland. That will be gone forever by tomorrow night. Vaya con dios Raiders of Oakland and The Black Hole.

The rest of the NFL schedule seems rather vanilla for one of the last weeks of the regular season. Bears at the Frozen Tundra to visit the Cheeser's is interesting, as it always is. The Bills in Pittsburgh should be as well. Arguably the best game is Houston at Tennessee. Both the Texans and Titans are 8-5, but the Titans are on a serious roll with Ryan Tannehill as QB. Never saw that coming at the start of the season, and I will take the Titans at home on this one.

Raiders music by Metallica. Because that is perfect. Soak up the last rumble in the Black Hole.

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# NCAA CONFERENCE CHAMPIONSHIP WEEKEND TRASH TALK

In the Pros and Joes discussion, this weekend features the Joes. It is the conference championship weekend, and the final action before the Final Football Four are selected. So, let's start there.

Utah was well on its way to a potential Championship final four appearance for the Pac-12. Nope. The Oregon Quackers made the Utes Duck. Bigly. Oregon undoubtedly goes to the Rose Bowl, and who knows about Utah. Their extremely good defense was shredded by the Ducks. Ouch. There are five more critical games on the schedule today, and Cincinnati and Memphis for the AAC is the lesser of them, though it may well be a fantastic game. It is in Memphis at Liberty Bowl stadium, so I will roll with the Tigers at their home.

With the Utah fail, that means Baylor versus Oklahoma (shoutout to our departed friend Freepatriot, who loved the Sooners), may well mean a final four berth. It is a neutral site. Something smells of a Baylor upset, but the Sooners are now coached by Line Riley as opposed to Bob Stoops, so I don't think so. Sooners. The BIG Championship is played in Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis. Would be a fantastic story if Wisconsin could beat the Bucks, but that is a bad bet. Virginia may get Cavalier and upset Trevor Lawrence and Clemson, but it would be shocking. Clemson and Lawrence started a little slow this year, but are undefeated and are averaging 50 points a game since mid-October.

That leaves the big one, i.e. the SEC championship, played in HotLanta. Georgia, the current number 4, versus the Tigers of LSU, the current number 2. Without much question the most anticipated game of the day. Frankly, it is hard to see how Ohio State ever jumped above LSU, in

fact by the record as of now, it is a joke. LSU has the likely Heisman winner, Joe Burrow, at QB, and he has been lighting people up. Georgia is really good. The defenses are both great, but the offenses, and specifically the QB's will likely determine this. Burrow just looks a lot better than Jake Fromm, I'll take the Bayou Tigers.

So that leaves the Pros. Da Bears already beat the Cowboys, which likely makes Scribe smile wildly. Dallas just does not look good, and Garrett has to be gone at the end of the season. Baltimore is at Buffalo, and the Ravens seem a good bet. But every time people write the Wagon Circlers off this year, they surprise. I'll take Jackson and the Ravens, but don't sleep on the Buffalo defense, they might contain him. Would not be surprised if the Broncos upset the Texans in Houston, but that is also not a good bet. The Steelers are here at the Cardinals. The Cards are improving, but still not that good. Duck Duck should go go against them, even in the Bird's Nest. The Rams are resurgent, and are hosting the Squawks, and that could be a great game.

There are two truly great games. The first is the Chefs of KC visiting Foxborough to see Bill Bel and the boys. Frankly, the Pats offense has looked old and bad lately, and are putting so much pressure on their excellent defense that the D is starting to falter. My bet is that Pat Mahomes engineers more points than Brady, and that is that. The second is Niners at Saints. Both teams are 10-2, and this game is almost certainly for home field in the NFC. Wow, this should be a game! Stars everywhere. Jimmy G is not up to Drew Brees' level yet, but he has established himself as a frontline QB in the NFL, and his tight end, George Kittle is the new Gronk. On offense, the nod has to go to Brees with Michael Thomas and Alvin Kamara. The SF defense, with rookie stud Nick Bosa and veteran Arik Armstead up front, is really good though. The Saints are hosting in the Superdome, and for that reason only, they get the call. Who dat?

Our colleague Peter has suggested [this article on ESPN](#) be discussed. It involves traumatic brain injury, more commonly known as CTE, but this time in hockey players.

A Minnesota judge on Wednesday ordered that a former member of the “Miracle on Ice” U.S. Olympic team should be committed to a secure treatment facility, saying the hockey star is mentally ill and dangerous.

Mark Pavelich, 61, of Lutsen, was charged with felony assault in August for allegedly beating a friend with a metal pole, breaking several bones.

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According to Cuzzo’s order, one psychologist found Pavelich had delusions and paranoia, including a delusion that those closest to him were trying to poison him. Another psychologist found he suffered from a mild neurocognitive disorder due to traumatic brain injury, likely related to repeated head injuries.

Pavelich’s family members have said they believe he suffers from CTE, or chronic traumatic encephalopathy, after repeated concussions from his time in the NHL. They said they started seeing changes in him a few years ago and he has refused help.

As sad as this is, it is really important. It is also something that is starting to be covered. One of the ones who has been on this story from the start is Sheila Dingus, who runs a great spot known as [Advocacy For Fairness In Sports](#). Here is some of her writings on the [NHL concussion litigation](#).

Music today by Pink Floyd. Enjoy the weekend folks.

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# TURKEY BOWL TRASH TALK

Think I've recounted this in some previous year, but bmaaz the younger and friends used to have a yearly Turkey Bowl football game on Thanksgiving mornings. Always at one or another local high school field. They were theoretically flag games, but the contact was full and real. And the alcohol was flowing because, well, it was necessary to cover the hangover from Thanksgiving Eve. People got hurt. If you left only a little bloodied, it was a very good day. I kind of miss those days, but not that much. The holiday is much less stressful piloting a comfy couch with a fire and big screen TeeVee.

There are three NFL games today. The stinker is, obviously, the Bears at the Lions. The Bears are just miserable and still have to think, every week, about the quarterbacks they didn't take because they took Trubisky. Every week. The Lions have Matt Stafford, who is actually a very good QB who might well have championships if he had spent his career on a better team. But Matt Stafford ain't walking through that door today, he is out. The Kittlehs don't even have Jeff Driskel, and will start an undrafted scrub named David Blough. In fairness, the Lions have kept him around all year, and he had a pretty good career at Purdue. There are some pretty good former Purdue QBs over time, think Drew Brees, Bob Griese, Len Dawson etc. All Hall Of Famers, or in Brees' case, soon to be. So the Kittlehs have a shot if Blough catches fire, and Detroit might as well let him rip, because they really don't have anything to lose.

Second up is Buffalo at Dallas. Buffalo, at 8-3, has the far better record. Josh Allen is maturing and improving, especially as the Bills have been running their offense up tempo lately, but nobody will mistake him for Jim Kelly

anytime soon. Dak Prescott has had himself a year so far, though not against the Pats. Both teams have good defense. I expect the 'Boys will win this, but it will be good to see how the Wagon Circlers play against real competition.

Speaking of Drew Brees, the last course on the menu today is Nawlins at HotLanta. The Falcons have been playing a LOT better of late, and they all need to for their jobs at this point, especially coach Dan Quinn. But I simply cannot see the Saints laying another egg against the Falcons like they did in their last meeting. The Saints, with only two losses are still in contention with the Niners for home field in the NFC. They call him the Brees, and the Saints keep rolling down that road.

Happy Thanksgiving folks. Eat some food, consume some libations, and settle in. And, from all of us here at Emptywheel, thank you. Thank you for being here, thank you for being so smart across the board, and thank you for participating. It is truly what makes us go. By the way, the banner is PuppyQ, aka the White Walker, who is firmly implanted on the bed, and not budging, as I compost this Trash. Music is Carvin' The Bird by the incomparable Charlie Parker.