

THE SUNS

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Never.
Teams
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usually in decent shape at 3-1, but the finals chickens are far from hatched. The series resumes in Phoenix at The Arena on Monday, and let's go, because the Clips are a very worthy team, even without Kawhi Leonard, who does look quite unavailable for the playoffs.

Our daughter has been watching a lot of soccer, and I do not really understand it so well sometimes. Have tried to tell her about what is going on with the Suns. I was at every Suns home playoff game in 1993. Almost went to Chicago for a Finals game there, but a case quashed that idea. I saw all the others here though. She was not yet born then, that is how long it has been.

Regulars here will remember the story of me being held in contempt by a presiding judge for refusing to answer questions at a grand jury. It was literally during the 1993 NBA Finals. The judge, an uncommonly decent guy, and a basketball fan from Indiana, said show me your tickets. They were in my suit pocket, and he let me leave. My season tix partner was freaking outside when I arrived. Was the night Chuck Barkley was awarded the MVP.

There have been a few decent seasons for the Suns since, but not many in a very long time. I long ago jettisoned the season tix because they are stupid expensive, and it no longer was very fun.

The owner, Robert Sarver, is still shit, but he is no longer overly visible. The current team acts and carries itself like the old teams under Jerry Colangelo, Cotton Fitzsimmons and Paul Westfall. In short, they are a joy to watch again.

So, we shall see how the playoffs play out. But it is exciting again in the desert. I bet the people in Milwaukee and Atlanta think so too. This is a good thing.

There is also the Styrian Grand Prix from the now Red Bull Ring, which used to be the A1 Ring. Not one of the best circuits, but the grid is interesting, with Verstappen on top. It is nice to see some natural green landscape again after all that garish paint at the Paul Ricard Circuit in France last week.

ON HELMETS AND VACCINATIONS



Okay, so I told an old war story from the motorcycling days of my youth in an earlier thread. In response to a Raven Eye comment, I said:

“Your story of father and BB guns really holds water though. A friend and me, pre driver’s license, used to ride dirt bikes all over what is now suburbia. We

would take 410 shotguns out quail and dove hunting. They seemed, shall we say, not very effective at range. So, one day with leathers and helmets on, we paced off, maybe 50-75 yards and shot at each other. We each took some pellets but no harm. And that is the kind of stupid your father foresaw.”

As stupid as it sounds on the surface, it was fine. We were both wearing motorcycling attire and full coverage helmets. Looking back, it still falls in the “things you ought not do” department. But we were in no real danger, just young and stupid.

I’ll get to the “vaccinations” part of this post in a minute, but back to helmets. I never even thought to wear a bicycle helmet, whether riding on the streets of Tempe in college (hey, I got sideswiped once!), or on those of Santa Monica in the summers. Literally never crossed my mind. Now they are ubiquitous on almost every bicyclist you see.

Back to the helmet thing. I wore a Bell Star, with flip down visor. It cost an insane amount of money at the time, but my mother paid it in a heartbeat, as my friends and I did not just ride to hunt quail and dove, we raced motocross and hare and hounds. It was the classic white Bell Star one, with a flag decal on each side. My friend in this story did not wear a Bell, but, I think, a Shoei. There were not that many full coverage helmets that early. Either way, we were pretty safe for the 410 test.

That Bell helmet later saved my life. I had done some wrenching on a friend’s Yamaha 250 (close to what I had raced earlier), and was taking it home to him. Doing 30-40 mph on a large street with a palm tree median when a little sports car made a left turn in front of me. The bike collapsed into the side, and I was catapulted over it and landed 20-30 yards on the other side, on my knees, elbows and head. The elbows were skinned, the knees really hurt, and the

trusty Bell Star was cracked in the cranium section. Cracked. That would have been my head. I went to the hospital for a checkup, but was released within a couple of hours. Concussions were not yet a thing.

Such is the value of helmets. But how many people out there now, without a thought, wear bicycle helmets, but ignorantly refuse to get vaccinated? I honestly do not know the answer, but it strikes me that it may be a quantifiable amount. And how is that exactly? Here is an NFL player, once “hesitant” that found the vaccine Jesus. Good for Travis Kelce. For one and all, PLEASE go get fully vaccinated; it is good for you, your family and society. It, like helmets, can save lives. Do it.

LET THE GIRLS ROCK AND ROLL AT INDY

The
good
news:



There is a full on female racing team about to run the Indy 500 in about an hour and a half. The effort is awesome. Hopefully transformational. For any interested, this is a must read ESPN article by Alyssa Roenigk:

Roughly 30 laps into Sunday’s 105th running of the Indianapolis 500, driver Simona De Silvestro will pull into pit lane. In the six seconds it takes to refuel her No. 16 Paretta Autosport Chevrolet, her crew will swap out four Firestones, adjust the front wing and attend to the Aeroscreen windshield on her IndyCar. Typically, teams want pits

that are flawless, fast and fade into the noise of the race.

But the Paretta team expects to attract attention. Because for the first time in motorsports history, four of its seven over-the-wall pit crew members will be women. De Silvestro's two spotters will be women. Two of her engineers, including a Data Acquisition Guy, will be women. And every front office role at Paretta Autosport – from business operations to public relations to merchandise and marketing – is filled by a woman.

"It's important to me that the bigger message is this isn't women at the expense of men," says team owner Beth Paretta, whose vision to create a coed race team has been six years in the making. "I'm trying to expand the grid."

During the team's first outing at the Indy 500, Paretta hopes young girls see ponytails fly over the wall during pit stops and women engineers communicating from the timing stand. She also wants the novelty to wear off quickly: "My hope is that in five years, us being a team of mostly women is the least interesting thing about us.

Women have run Indy before. The famous and first was Janet Guthrie. Then through Danica Patrick, who actually finished on the podium once. Danica was a fine driver, and earned the rides she got. But, for my limited money, the best was always Lyn St. James. Lyn could drive any race car, anywhere, anytime. She was all that. If Lyn had the equipment Patrick was afforded, she might well have a Borg Warner trophy in her living room.

That is the current, and the history, you might wish to have been different. But times ARE different, and excellent inroads are being made,

even if slowly. The Paretta effort is a significant part of that.

The bad news:

Simona and Paretta made the field for today's race, but barely. She qualified in P33, the last position on the outside of the last row. Unlike F1, such is not a death knell for a driver at Indy. We shall see how it all works out, and all hopes for well. De Silvestro can drive. There may be shakier equipment in the field. But what an awesome movement, and may it well continue.

THE SHOCKING BLUE STREETS OF MONACO

Would you like to hot lap Monaco? Before you say this, watch it. Part real part not, but it is pretty darn good. Seriously, go watch it. Even the legends in F1 don't really know how to pass in Monaco. They still love it there, but the racing has never been great if you are a TV spectator other than the fact it is beyond beautiful. Mansell could not pass Senna, and nobody else can on that track either.

F1 racing is old. It is older than us individually, unless your sentient stage preceded 1950. So, what is up on the streets in Monte Carlo? You think this is NASCAR or some lumbering junk? No.

Ferrari is up through practice. Doubt that will



continue after qualifying, but one can hope. Expect Mercedes and Red Bull to still lead after qualify. But it sure is more fun if the Red are in the game.

And, as I write this, qualify is on, so will update a bit later.

If a picture is worth a thousand words, the Cahier Archive counts as a million. Thank you again Paul-Henri Cahier for letting me pilfer your, and Bernard's, pictures occasionally. The Cahiers and the astounding Cahier Archive have long been kind and the most amazing F1 photographers ever.

Music is by Mariska Veres and The Shocking Blue, a shockingly good band. Remembered for Venus, but did a lot of very good work.

THE NFL DRAFT 2021 AND PORTUGUESE GP

Down to the stretch in the NBA, and a week from now the order will be pretty fascinating. Some fun stuff in MLB, what with the Cubs Rizzo striking out MVP Frederick Freeman. Both were incredible sports about the encounter, and it was great. But MLB is early still.

So, to the NFL Draft. One seems sure to the Jags with Trevor Lawrence, and two, seemingly so to the Jets Jets Jets. Three, however, seemed to be either Mac Jones or Trey Lance to the Niners. But Mr. Discount Doublecheck threw a monkey wrench into the equation by saying he wants out of the Packers. That is a real monkey wrench. The Patriots still need a future at QB; might it be Jimmy G, might they move up for a rook? Nobody knows what Bill Bel will do. Suffice it to say that tonight's first round will be pretty exciting. After that, the draft far less so.

As to the Portuguese Grand Prix, well, it should be interesting. I honestly thought Lewis Hamilton was done at the Emilia-Romagna GP at Imola when he went off into the kitty litter for what seemed like an interminable amount of time. But Lewis is Lewis, and he covered to not only place in the points, but finish in P2. Insane, but that is quintessential Lewis. So, despite all that, Hamilton still leads the Drivers Championship by a point over Verstappen, 44 to 43, with McLaren's Norris an admirable, but yet distant, third at 27.

So, on to Portugal, what will happen? The weather looks okay at Potimao for the maiden cruise of the F1 "sprint qualifying". As you might guess, I am not crazy about "sprint qualifying" for F1. The problem with F1 has been with lack of field competitiveness as to equipment, not drivers or qualification stunts. This TV stunt bullshit is not the F1 I grew up with. And it sucks.

So, let's get it started with the NFL Draft, the Portuguese GP and any and everything else.

THE F1 CIRCUS BEGINS AGAIN, AND RIP TO A FRIEND

Hi lug nuts, the Emptywheel F1 season is starting! The traditional opening in Australia has been moved to the end of the year, and the opening race is Bahrain this weekend. I firmly believe that F1 ought not be in the homes of authoritarian despots in places like Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and Abu Dhabi. They are there on the 2021 calendar nevertheless.

So, Mercedes and Red Bull were front and center in the practice sessions, with Verstappen and Red Bull ahead of Hamilton, Bottas and the

Mercs. But the gap was narrowed significantly from practice, with Verstappen beating out Lewis by less than a 10th of a second. Bottas collected up P3, with Leclerc a surprising P4 in the Ferrari. The hard charging Pierre Gasly finished with P5 in the AlphaTauri, with Dan Ricciardo and Lando Norris (keep an eye open on these two) in McLarens for P6-P7. Fernando Alonso returns to F1 for Alpine and finished qualifying in a quite respectable P9, behind Carlos Sainz in the second Ferrari, and ahead of Lance Stroll in an Aston Martin.

Ferrari is still not yet right. Merc is closer to Red Bull than people think, and the middle third of the pack will be a LOT more interesting this year. It was better last year, and will be even more better this year, ahead of the multitude of changes on tap for 2022. For 2021, via Peterr, here is a team and drivers guide. Also, apparently F1, who has no problem racing in the most hideous of brutal authoritarian states, as noted above, don't like Lewis Hamilton speaking up about human rights:

Lewis Hamilton has stated his belief that Formula One can no longer ignore human rights issues in the countries it visits, putting the sport's chief executive, Stefano Domenicali, in an awkward position after he rejected calls to launch an independent inquiry into alleged human rights abuses associated with the Bahrain Grand Prix.

The F1 world champion was speaking before the season-opening race in Bahrain and was unequivocal in a stance he first displayed last year. "There are issues all around the world but I do not think we should be going to these countries and just ignoring what is happening in those places, arriving, having a great time and then leaving," said Hamilton, before revealing that he takes the situation in Bahrain so seriously that he has spent the past few

months educating himself on it.

“Coming here all these years I was not aware of all of the details of the human rights issues. I have spent time speaking to legal human rights experts, to human rights organisations like Amnesty,” the 36-year-old said. “I have been to see the UK ambassador here in Bahrain and spoken to Bahraini officials also. At the moment the steps I have taken have been private and I think that is the right way to go out about it but I am definitely committed to helping in any way I can.”

So, the circus begins in Bahrain, human rights abuses and all. Welcome to the club Lewis, I have been decrying the F1 posture in Bahrain since at least this time in 2012. But Lewis is really growing into his full throat, and that is a remarkably good and admirable thing.

On a sad note, if you have been around Emptywheel very long, especially on our F1 threads, you know and love Quebecois. I have not seen Quebecois since mid January. That is a long time, even outside of F1 season. I can no longer find where I saw it, but believe Quebecois has passed. He had cancer, had remitted it enough to start biking again, but I think it took him. I very much hope I am wrong about this, and that Quebecois appears with a triumphant “Dewey Beats Truman” newspaper in hand. I don’t think wrong though, and that is truly sad. The people here at this blog are everything, and all losses are hard. The long timers, especially so.

So, that is it for this week. One of Mrs. Bmaz’s employees, also an F1 fan, made me a F1 couch pillow, and that is the featured image. As to music, we have Rod The Mod and Elton with the entirely kick ass and very underrated rocker of Let Me Be Your Car.

Let me be your car for a while child
Shift me into gear and I’ll be there

Fill me up with five star gasoline girl
I'll be your car, I'll take you
anywhere.

STARS, GUITARS AND GEAR TRASH TALK

Now two weekends post Super Bowl. F1 is quietly gearing up, though there is nothin overly interesting until March 26-28, and it is now somehow in the authoritarian hellhole of Bahrain, where F1 should not even be, instead of Australia. So there is not much in the Trash Talk world right not. But it seems a talk thread might be useful for decompression.

There is one thing of note, the wonderful Naomi Osaka has just won her fourth slam at the Australian. Next to Serena and Venus, Osaka already has more Slams than any other woman currently playing. Doubt she will really catch up Serena (23), much less Margaret Smith Court (24), but a hell of a start on her career, and she can really play. Some real competition in that rarified air though, with Fraulein Forehand Steffi Graff at 22, Helen Wills Moody at 19, and Martina and Chrissy both at 18. Osaka is a real breath of fresh air.

A while back, somebody mentioned guitars in the middle of one of Rayne's threads and I, wrongfully, responded and helped hijack her post's comment section. My bad. So, since we do do music here too, and in lieu of nothing else, a real post for such discussion.

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confines of Casa de Bmaz. The main axe is a black Fender Strat. It plugs into a Crate Twin Twelve mostly tube amp. No, the Crate was not my choice, it literally got thrown in for \$100 or something by the guy I bought the pristine (seriously, the thing had the original price tag on it and came in a hard Gator case) Stratocaster. That was impossible to turn down, but since I don't play much, has been sufficient to keep me from procuring the Marshall half stack I have always wanted. So, yay and ugh at the same time.

Also have an acoustic, it is an Olympia, which is made by Fender. It could use some new strings about now, but it is really pretty nice. It is a hand me down from when Mrs. Bmaz decided she wanted to learn to play guitar and bought it. I told her bar chords were necessary, and hard, especially on an acoustic. That foray didn't last too long, and while not what I would have bought on my own, it is now mine, and, again, it is not bad at all. Don't play it much either.

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harp. No, not the huge variety, but the thing is really sweet. Another Mrs. Bmaz acquisition. Thing is, Lady Bmaz is, by a light year, the only real musician here. She has played piano since was a small child, and was at one point a real bonafide prodigy. She can not play for a year and still whip off concert level stuff.

Which brings up what got me going on this music equipment thing. A piano. A friend is aging and cleaning up some stuff and has just given us a Steinway baby grand. Have not even gotten it yet, and it will cost a small fortune to get professionally moved. We already had a Kawai baby, but this is too good to pass up.

Am sure Rosalind will drop in, and so must mention the ukulele here. Think it may have come across on the Lusitania or something, and at some point got a fraternity tattoo on by an in-law. It was rescued from said in-law's basement when they were moving on out. Think Rosalind looked at it, if not tried to play it. That is more than I have ever done.

Music today is Bite The Bullet by Neil Young and Crazy Horse, from American Stars and Bars, and it is spectacular. So, what gear you have, and why? Chat it up.

THE PANDEMIC SUPER BOWL LV

There is a game today in the NFL, and the last one for a good long while. As you may have heard there are a couple of decent quarterbacks involved. One is hands down the best in the league now, and the other is quite arguably the best in the league ever. So, there is that, and it has gotten most of the hype. But there are some other liner notes to hit.

Chiefs coach Andy Reid's son, Brett, is an assistant coach on the team (linebackers). Brett Reid was involved in a terrible accident Thursday night, and he admitted to having been drinking. Two children were hurt, one of them critically. Reid the younger did not travel with the team, and, obviously won't be coaching. As long as father Andy is there, the Chiefs should be okay, but this has to be a distraction. Now before people get all ginned up about why he is not yet under arrest, I don't know, but will lay pretty good odds that the police and state's attorney want to get the actual blood test results back before charging and arresting. Even expedited, that doesn't happen overnight. But, irrespective, Brett Reid is in for some serious trouble, especially as he has previous drug and road rage incidents. Also, apparently Chiefs DC Steve Sagnoulo's wife makes killer meatballs that powered the defense through last year's Super Bowl win, but she couldn't get them there this year for Covid reasons. That has to crush Honey Badger and friends!

On the Tampa side, they of course did not have to travel. Brady and Bruce Arians have mostly settled in with each other, are having fun, and Gronk too. They seem to be pretty fast and loose right now, which given this stage, is a very good thing. Tampa's defense is underrated, actually pretty darn good. But can they slow

down Tyreek Hill and Travis Kelce? They sure had a problem in that regard earlier in the year. But Tampa has some pretty killer receivers too with Gronk, Brate, Godwin, Evans, Scotty Miller and Antonio Brown. Mahomes is too fast, and too slick, he is going to get his passes off. The key likely comes down to whether the Bucs can sufficiently protect Brady so he does too. And the Chiefs will be coming hard and furiously for Brady from start to finish. The Chefs sure seem the better team overall, but it is hard to discount old Father Time Brady, and I won't. If forced to bet, I'd take KC; thank goodness I don't have to.

There entertainment is some guy called the Weekend. Never heard of him. Is it Saturday, Sunday, or all weekend? Ah well, though there were storms last night and early this morning, but things are looking pretty good now and for the game

Music today is for Eureka, and I have renamed the Robert Palmer classic "There's No Telling Where Carson Went". Have some fun folks!

JUST ANOTHER MANIC SUNDAY CONFERENCE CHAMPIONSHIP IN PANDEMIC

The time is here. First game of the day, Bucs at Packers, starts in less than an hour. Never pick against the Pack at home, but the Bucs and Brady may give them a game on the Tundra. I have no clue how it plays out, and make no pick. Yes, it is probably cowardly of me.

The second game is Bills at Chefs. On paper, this is an easy pick. Games are not played on paper though. on the field, there is no way to

sell the Bills short as to having cause to be here. They are great, and a great story. I, again, will coward out and have no clue how it unfolds.

Two great matchups and four great, and admirable, teams. That is how it should be. Games on!

Mondays may be manic, but the Bangles knew/wished Sundays were too. There is goodness that there is no Trump dick wagging on social media to interrupt this day. Let's have some fun, and rock the day.

NFL DIVISIONAL PLAYOFFS IN PANDEMIC TRASH TALK

Greetings to all fans, whether you are scoring at home, or alone in isolation. It is pretty remarkable that the NFL has made it this far without blowing up from Covid. Yet here they are down to four games this weekend, and most of the teams are pretty healthy and ready to go. So, let's get to it.

First up is the Rams at Packers. The Rams allowed the fewest points in the league this year. The Packers scored the most. No signs of snow by reports, but it will be around 32° with light to moderate wind. The Packers know how to play on the famously frozen tundra, but their record of never, or at least rarely, losing at Lambeau in the playoffs does not have the lock it once had. They can be had at home. The Rams were pretty high on young John Wolford at QB, but he is out for today and Jarred Goff is back in the saddle, bum thumb and all, and Blake Bortles will back him up. The Pack defense is certainly not on the level of the Rams, but they are solid. If Rodgers is Rodgers, the Pack

should win, but this is probably a lot closer than folks would expect.

Second game up for Saturday is Ravens at Bills. This may well turn out to be the best game of the weekend. Both teams have young QB's that can run in addition to throwing, and given the weather in Buffalo, that will likely be necessary. When it comes to passing though, the edge would seem to go to Buffalo with Josh Allen and Stephon Diggs, the best receiver in the NFL this year. Curiously, Baltimore has made running back Marlon Ingram a healthy scratch. That is weird as this is exactly the kind of game Ingram is made for. It is close, but a majority of the experts, both on local sports talk radio, and on TV, seem to favor the Ravens to win this. So do the odds makers. I'm not so sure, and will very tentatively take the Bills in a close game.

Early game Sunday is Browns at Chiefs. The Brownies are a great story this year and are playing with some swagger. They are not the Browns of the last 25 years. The Chiefs' defense is not nearly as good as Cleveland's. On the other hand, KC has the once in a generation wizardry of Patrick Mahomes, a dual headed monster at RB with Nick Chubb and Kareem Hunt. And, of course huge weapons in Tyreek Hill and Travis Kelce. They will, however, be without Sammy Watkins to take attention away from Hill. This could go any number of ways, but I am not going to bet against Mahomes and Andy Reid. Nope, no can do.

The coda on the weekend's games is the battle of the Glee QBs. The B boys, Brady and Brees. You know who they are by now. They have never met in the playoffs. During the regular season, the Saints owned the Bucs. In fairness, Tampa Bay finally gelled down the end stretch of the regular season and is playing much better now, and has also integrated Antonio Brown into their game much better. With Chris Godwin and Mike Evans (both a tad nicked up, but ready to play), that is one hell of a set of receivers. Oh, and

there is that Gronk guy healthy and ready to rumble at TE. Saints have the outstanding Alvin Kamara at RB, and Bucs have Fournette and Ronald Jones. By a slim margin, most of the experts, including Vegas, favor the Saints. They are at home, but without the usual crowd advantage that would portend. I have no idea how it will go, so will simply call it a tossup.

Music today by the incomparable Thin Lizzy. Man, I miss those boys. But rock and roll and tilt a cold one.