

THE EMPTYWHEEL FABULOUS CAR BLOG! FORMULA ONE AND CAR FLICKS

So, we shall take a brief respite from the fabulous music blog this weekend to bring you a fabulous car blog. Off to the races!

There has been a shake up in the F1 force. And man is it palpable. By the end of the last circus, it was quite clear that management at Ferrari had come to consider young Charles Leclerc as their number one driver, over four time World Champ and presumptive number one, Sebastian Vettel. It was no secret on the paddock from the people I still talk to. Vettel knew it, Leclerc knew it, everyone knew it. It has so come to pass. The 2020 season driver stables were already set, and they will continue as such. But for the 2021 season, which is now well less than a year away, big changes are afoot.

Vettel is out at Ferrari, and Carlos Sainz is in. Sainz is very, very good, and his family has a rich history in motorsports. He is commonly viewed as a very good pilot, but one hampered by less than first order equipment, and I think that is right. Sainz will have that kind of car now. He and Leclerc will make for a great, and energized young team. That is something Ferrari is not usually known for, but this is a great move, and one for the times at hand. Sainz is leaving McLaren, who is poised to replace him for 2021 with Daniel Ricciardo. This is also a great move for McLaren, who sign up a true number one driver, with numerous F1 wins and podiums, to pair with the still quite young, but promising, Lando Norris. Take note: for 2021, McLaren starts getting Mercedes engines to pair with their already ridiculously good chassis. Don't sleep on McLaren.

Where do the rest of the chips fall? Now there is the great unknown. Vettel is a four time champ, can he find a home at all? Sebastian can still drive, you would think so, but that is up in the air. Do Hamilton and Bottas stay as a team for 2021? My guess is yes, but that is also a question. The F1 season was supposed to kick off in March with the Australian, but the Covid thing put the kibosh on that. It is tentatively scheduled to start with Austria in seven weeks, maybe for two races, and then Silverstone with two races. They are desperate to get at least a fifteen race schedule in, if possible. And will there be fans in the stands? Initially, it looks like no, but stay tuned.

Okay, since not everybody knows F1 as well, we are tossing in car movies for this weekend. There are a litany of great ones. You know what you have seen and appreciated over the years. I am going to throw out a few of my favorites just to get the ball rolling. They are by no means exhaustive, and not necessarily in a perfectly ranked order.

Grand Prix _ John Frankenheimer's 1966 opus is the gold standard. It is a tad long, but the characters gritty and the performances beyond fantastic across the board. The driving scenes are some of the best ever, as well as John's innovative use of split screen, a legendary move.

Vanishing Point – From 1971, and calling it a cult classic is not giving it enough credit. Spectacular and haunting in a myriad of ways.

They Drive By Night – Directed by Raoul Walsh and starring George Raft, Humphrey Bogart, Ann Sheridan and Ida Lupino. It is both a driving movie and film noir, both at their best. Fantastic.

Two Lane Blacktop – This movie is great. The genius is obvious. Really, you have to see it, and while James Taylor is

surprisingly good, keep your eye on Warren Oates, in a legendary performance. Duel from the same year, generally considered to be Steven Spielberg's first full movie. is very good, but Two Lane Blacktop is better.

It Happened One Night – There has to be room for at least one comedy here, and this is it. Clark Gable and Claudette Colbert are simply perfect, as is the story. Capra and Cohn at their best. Walter Connolly darn near stole the show.

Some honorable mentions in no particular order: Dirty Mary, Crazy Larry, Thelma and Louise, Used Cars (Kurt Russell and Jack Warden were fantastic. A real sleeper, even if a low budget one), Baby Driver (seriously great and a must watch).

Okay folks, rip this joint with your thoughts!

THE FABULOUS EMPTYWHEEL MUSIC BLOG: LITTLE RICHARD

Little Richard was everything. If it wasn't Chuck Berry, it was Richard Wayne Penniman. The definition of rock and roll.

THE FABULOUS

EMPTYWHEEL MUSIC BLOG: SETTING THE SCENE

We have done live music for a couple of weeks, now let's set the scene with the greatest music documentaries.

ARRRRR MATEY, THERE BE A NEW BUCCO IN THE BAY

Gronk is back. He and TB12 will look a LOT different playing in a Bruce Arians offense. This is truly exciting, and will be when the NFL comes back.

COMING ATTRACTIONS: EMPTYWHEEL LIVE MUSIC TRASH TALK

Emptywheel Music Trash Talk is an idea long discussed, but the time may have come. Listen, this would be a kind of dead period anyway. Get ready to get live, get ready to rip up this juke joint. Fill the hills with the sound of live music.

SUPER BOWL LIV: WHO WILL PARTY WITH THE LOMBARDI

Who will win the Super Bowl on Groundhog Day?

CHAMPIONSHIP SUNDAY TRASH TALK

Last Sunday of football before the Super Bowl, so only two games today. But they should be great ones. Couple of other things in the news too.

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 O'Brien?

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).

NFL DIVISIONAL PLAYOFF WEEKEND

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

THE JOKER IS WILDCARD WEEKEND

The college season is down to one game, not to be played for another week. Wildcard weekend it is. Will the Pats survive, or is the end?