

2020

Quarter Finals



EFL

ELITE FOOTBALL LEAGUE

Blazing Through a Pandemic in our 14th Season!



February 14, 2021

EAST



BRUXELLES 20

20



IOWA CITY 23

23



BROOKLIN 3

3



DURHAM 17

17

VIRDEN 26

26



COBB COUNTY 27

27



BUDAPEST 27

27



AURORA 23

23

NORTH



CENTRAL



WEST



COASTAL



SOUTH



HAIL DAVANTE!

Davante Adams
Aurora Mustangs



Aurora wide receiver, *Davante Adams* hauls in a bomb from *Matt Ryan* as Durham's *Richard Sherman* looks on in 2nd quarter action in the Quarter Final game at Magna Park in Aurora. The score was one of the rare offensive highlights in a tightly-fought defensive struggle that saw the Mustangs' defence hold off a late push for a 23-17 win.



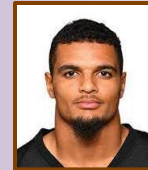
*Who was slick
in Week
Sixteen?*

**"Brylcreem" THE
EFL'S FIRST SPONSOR**



DeVante Parker
QB
Cobb County
Coyotes

7 Rec., 147 yards, 1 TD. Caught 7 of 10 targets plus 56-yard game-winning TD.



Minkah Fitzpatrick
S
Budapest North
Stars

6 TD, 1 PD, 1 INT (0-yds). Red zone INT to stop opening drive early turning point.



20

Bruxelles



GAME CENTER
2020
Pacific Quarter Finals



26

Virден

TEAM LEADERS

Passing	Cmp	Att	Yds	TD
Goff	27	48	347	2
Rushing	Car	Yds	Avg	TD
Fournette	23	105	4.6	0
Receiving	Rec	Yds	Avg	TD
Kelce	8	116	14.5	0

Team	1	2	3	4	OT	Total
Bruxelles	3	7	3	7	-	20
Virден	0	19	7	0	-	26

TEAM LEADERS

Passing	Cmp	Att	Yds	TD
Mahomes	21	32	307	2
Rushing	Car	Yds	Avg	TD
Mahomes	5	45	9.0	0
Receiving	Rec	Yds	Avg	TD
Cooper	6	95	15.8	1

Play of the Game

In the 3rd quarter, 4:01 on the clock, Virден with 2nd & 1 at the Bruxelles 10-yard line, **Ezekiel Elliott** runs through a tackle by **Luke Kuechly** and into the end zone for the eventual game-winning TD.

MAHOMES DEFUSES BOMBERS!

VIRDEN QB THROWS 2 TD PASSES IN CONTROVERSIAL VICTORY!

SUMMARY: When these teams played in Week Three, the Violators prevailed in a 41-33 shootout that produced over 900 yards of total offence and scores on all but one drive of a back-and-forth first half. For their playoff re-match, the Bombers focused more on defending the pass in an effort to slow down **Patrick Mahomes**. This strategy kept the score down, but in the end the Virден quarterback made the plays he needed to make in order to prevail in a tightly-contested victory marred by an officiating controversy late in the 4th quarter. The Bombers got on the board first with a 32-yard **Matt Prater** field goal off the opening drive, but the Violators would later respond with 4-yard TD run by **Ezekiel Elliott** on the first play of the 2nd quarter and a 4-yard flip to **Eric Ebron** in the end zone on their next series. **Zane Gonzalez** missed both extra point attempts, however, making the score 12-3 and creating the possibility of problems later in the game. The Bombers batched together three straight pass plays for 52 yards then pounded the ball on the ground with **Leonard Fournette** to set up their first touchdown, a 10-yard pass from **Jared Goff** to **Dede Westbrook** to narrow the lead to 12-10. Virден responded with an all-aerial 75-yard drive that finished with Mahomes hitting **Amari Cooper** on a slant from 13 yards for the TD. Gonzalez made the extra point and Virден went into half time up 19-10. Bruxelles drove to the Virден 13 on their first drive of the 2nd half but had to settle for a field goal. Virден drove back 75 yards with the help of a personal foul on **Frank Clark** and a 26-yard pass to Cooper to set up a 10-yard TD run by Elliott, his second of the game. On the verge of getting blown out, the Bombers counter-attacked, with Goff hitting **Chris Godwin** for 24 yards then later for 18 yards and a TD to pull within 6, trailing 26-20 early in the 4th quarter. The Bruxelles 'D' held and the offence got the ball back at their own 3. They drove all the way to the Virден 5-yard line, where Fournette was stuffed for a 4-yard loss then Goff fired incomplete to bring up 4th & goal at the 9. But a late delay-of-game call, later overturned, caused the Bombers to run a play with half their personnel standing still. They turned the ball over on downs at the 5 with 0:47 left. They got the ball back with 0:17 left, after burning their timeouts, but could not score as the Virден 'D' held.

QUOTES: "The last time I saw such amateurish refereeing was when my nephew played in Pop Warner. Yeah, we were slow getting the play in, but you still can't have a delay-of-game penalty called late then overturn it. The refs should be penalized for delay-of-call!" – Bruxelles coach, **Ken Main**.
"I was as confused as anybody by that call. But you know, if they had somehow scored there, with our safeties pulling up at the whistle, the controversy would be going the other way. Good thing Sheldon [Richardson] doesn't pay attention to whistles!" – Virден coach, **Lance Barrate**.



ANGRY FAN



titter

HAPPY FAN



Faart van Wijnendaele FVW@BrusselsTimes
Many people will see this as a league fix to get their top young star to the final. I am in agreement. ;vreselijk!



Marquis de Sade @mdsviolate
What better way to show control than the referees themselves bowing to the domination of our #violators!



Bruxelles 20 Virden 26



	1	2	3	4	F
Bruxelles	3	7	3	7	20
Virden	0	19	7	0	26

* Playoff * 02-15-2021 TERRORDOME Temp:70 Wind: No Line MVP:Mahomes HFA:

1	10:32	Bruxelles	FG	Prater 32 (8-61-4:23)	3-0
2	14:52	Virden	TD	Elliott 4 run (no good) (6-66-2:44)	3-6
2	6:44	Virden	TD	Mahomes 4 pass to Ebron (no good) (9-81-5:32)	3-12
2	2:12	Bruxelles	TD	Goff 10 pass to Westbrook (Prater) (8-75-4:32)	10-12
2	0:35	Virden	TD	Mahomes 13 pass to Cooper (Gonzalez) (8-75-1:37)	10-19
3	6:06	Bruxelles	FG	Prater 31 (13-59-6:25)	13-19
3	3:13	Virden	TD	Elliott 10 run (Gonzalez) (5-60-2:38)	13-26
4	14:44	Bruxelles	TD	Goff 18 pass to Godwin (Prater) (8-75-3:29)	20-26

Passing	Att	Cmp	Yds	25	In	Td	Sk	Rate
Goff	48	27	347	3	0	2	0	93.0
	48	27	347	3	0	2	0	93.0

Passing	Att	Cmp	Yds	25	In	Td	Sk	Rate
Mahomes	32	21	307	2	0	2	2	117.6
	32	21	307	2	0	2	2	117.6

Rushing	Att	Yds	Avg	FD	10	Lg	Td
Fournette	23	105	4.6	5	1	17	0
Johnson	3	9	3.0	0	0	4	0
Goff	1	0	0.0	1	0	0	0
	27	114	4.2	6	1	17	0

Rushing	Att	Yds	Avg	FD	10	Lg	Td
Mahomes	5	45	9.0	3	3	19	0
Elliott	12	42	3.5	4	1	10	2
	17	87	5.1	7	4	19	2

Receiving	No	Dp	Att	Yds	Avg	FD	25	Lg	Td
Kelce	8	0	16	116	14.5	8	1	31	0
Godwin	7	0	12	124	17.7	5	1	25	1
Thompson	4	0	5	17	4.3	1	0	6	0
Waller	3	0	3	37	12.3	3	0	16	0
Fournette	3	0	8	30	10.0	1	1	26	0
Westbrook	2	0	2	23	11.5	2	0	13	1
Valdes-Scan	0	0	1	0	0.0	0	0	0	0
Claypool	0	0	1	0	0.0	0	0	0	0
	27	0	48	347	12.9	20	3	31	2

Receiving	No	Dp	Att	Yds	Avg	FD	25	Lg	Td
Cooper	6	1	7	95	15.8	6	1	26	1
Brown	5	0	8	85	17.0	4	1	25	0
Sanu	5	0	8	84	16.8	5	0	19	0
Ebron	3	0	4	25	8.3	3	0	12	1
Elliott	2	1	5	18	9.0	1	0	9	0
	21	2	32	307	14.5	19	2	26	2

Fumbles	No	Rec	Td
	0	0	0

Fumbles	No	Rec	Td
	0	0	0

Kick Returns	No	Yds	Avg	Lg	Td
	0	0	0.0	0	0

Kick Returns	No	Yds	Avg	Lg	Td
Patterson	1	17	17.0	17	0
	1	17	17.0	17	0

Punt Returns	No	Fc	Yds	Avg	Lg	Td
Roberts	2	1	9	4.5	8	0
	2	1	9	4.5	8	0

Punt Returns	No	Fc	Yds	Avg	Lg	Td
Ervin	0	2	0	0.0	0	0
	0	2	0	0.0	0	0

Kicking	FG	Lg	XP	Pts
Prater	2-3	32	2-2	8

Kicking	FG	Lg	XP	Pts
Gonzalez	0-0	0	2-4	2

Punting	No	Yds	Avg	Tb	20	Bk	Lg
Kern	2	104	52.0	0	1	0	53

Punting	No	Yds	Avg	Tb	20	Bk	Lg
Mann	4	182	45.5	0	2	0	50

Defense	Tkl	Sk	Def	Stf	Hur	FF	Int
Moreau	7	0	1	0	0	0	0-0
Clark	6	1	0	0	0	0	0-0
Slay	6	0	1	0	0	0	0-0
Fuller	5	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Smith,H	4	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Kuechly	2	0	2	0	0	0	0-0
Watts	2	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Flowers	1	1	0	0	0	0	0-0
Dupree	1	0	0	0	1	0	0-0
Smith,P	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Casey	1	0	0	1	0	0	0-0
Phillips	1	0	0	1	0	0	0-0
Davis	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Evans	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Wilson,T	0	0	1	0	0	0	0-0
	39	2	5	2	1	0	0-0

Defense	Tkl	Sk	Def	Stf	Hur	FF	Int
Bradham	12	0	0	1	0	0	0-0
Clinton-Dix	8	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Floyd	6	0	2	0	0	0	0-0
Peters	6	0	2	0	0	0	0-0
Hooker	5	0	2	0	0	0	0-0
Williams	5	0	0	1	1	0	0-0
Harris,Jr.	4	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Lawrence II	4	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Richardson	2	0	1	0	0	0	0-0
Waynes	1	0	1	0	0	0	0-0
Van Ginkel	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Spence	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Okafor	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Dawson Jr.	0	0	2	0	0	0	0-0
Heyward	0	0	1	0	1	0	0-0
Collins Sr.	0	0	1	0	0	0	0-0
Adderley	0	0	1	0	0	0	0-0
	56	0	13	2	2	0	0-0



Led team in passing (307) and rushing (45) yards and threw 2 TD passes in win.

	Bruxelles	Virden
First Downs	27	27
Rushes	27-114	17-87
Passes	48-27-347	32-21-307
Sacked	0-0	2-15
Fumble	0	0
Penalties	7-65	4-36
Turnovers	0	0
Missed Tackles	4	6
Dropped Passes	0	2
Bad Passes	3	4
Passes 25+	3	2
Runs 10+	1	4
Blitzers	27	9
Time	35:36	24:24
Third Down	8-15	3-7
Fourth Down	0-1	0-0
Red Att/Td/Fg	5/2/2	4/4/0
Net Offense	461	379



23

Iowa City



GAME CENTER 2020 Pacific Quarter Finals



27

Cobb County

TEAM LEADERS

Passing	Cmp	Att	Yds	TD
Wilson	12	21	105	1
Rushing	Car	Yds	Avg	TD
Mixon	20	134	6.7	1
Receiving	Rec	Yds	Avg	TD
Beasley	3	21	7.0	0

Team	1	2	3	4	OT	Total
Iowa City	0	3	7	13	-	23
Cobb County	10	7	3	7	-	27

TEAM LEADERS

Passing	Cmp	Att	Yds	TD
Tannehill	16	29	293	2
Rushing	Car	Yds	Avg	TD
Mostert	13	92	7.2	0
Receiving	Rec	Yds	Avg	TD
Paker	7	147	21.0	1

Play of the Game

4th quarter, 7:51 left, score tied at 20, Coyotes' ball at their own 44, Ryan Tannehill connects with DeVante Parker, who sheds three tacklers on way to game-winning 56-yard TD pass.

RYAN TANN'S CUBS' HIDES!

TANNEHILL RUNS FOR 1, PASSES FOR 2 TDs TO LEAD COYOTES TO WIN!

SUMMARY: On a calm, mild day at Coyote Field, the Cubs and the Coyotes squared off in a battle of division winners. Cobb County was coming off only its second loss of the year in the season's final week, while red hot Iowa City had won six in a row after losing to these same Coyotes back in Week 10. Cobb County QB, Ryan Tannehill dispelled rumours of an unreported injury by completing his first 4 passes for a total of 62 yards and finishing off a 75-yard opening drive with a 5-yard, 3rd & goal check down to fullback, J.P. Holtz for the game's first TD. The Cubs' offence struggled to get into a rhythm in the first half. After falling behind 10-0 the offence caught a break when Alec Ogletree intercepted Tannehill and gave them the ball at the Cobb County 43. But after moving a modest 16 yards, Russell Wilson was sacked by K'Lavon Chiasson on third down, forcing them to settle for a 53-yard Justin Tucker field goal. The Coyotes drove back up the field, mixing runs by Raheem Mostert and passes to three different receivers to arrive at the Iowa 1-yard line after Casey Hayward was flagged for pass interference in the end zone covering Julio Jones. Tannehill took it in himself on the next play to give the home team a 17-3 lead. The Cubs answered with a solid drive from their 18-yard line to the outer edge of Tucker's field goal range at the Coyote 34. They opted to go for it on 4th & 7 and James Connor was tackled for a 2-yard loss, keeping the score differential at 14 heading into half time. The Cubs opened the 2nd half with a strong drive from their own 19-yard line. Conner and Joe Mixon laid the groundwork for a 9-yard TD pass to Christian Kirk to pull within 7 points. The teams traded field goals on subsequent possessions to make the score 20-13 for Cobb County early in the 4th. The Cubs tied it up with the help of a 3rd & 20 pass-interference penalty on Steve Nelson, which set up a 30-yard TD run by Mixon on the next play. Cobb County fired back, re-taking the lead when Tannehill hit DeVante Parker in stride on a medium cross for a 56-yard catch-and-run touchdown. The Cubs drove back to the Cobb County 29, where they elected to kick a field goal with 3:37 left, hoping to get the ball back, but still needing a touchdown. The Coyotes recovered a botched snap then went on to gain 3 first downs to run out the clock for the win.

QUOTES: "Our players fought hard today! I am really proud of my boys. That was a mighty team on the other side and we came really, really close to pulling out the win after falling behind like that. I have nothing bad to say. Great game by both teams!" - Iowa City coach, Deron Redding. "We will have to tighten up our fourth quarter defence if we plan to advance any further. Any day you win a playoff game in this league is a good day, but don't expect me to dance a jig after we almost gave it away in the last quarter." - Coyote coach, Eron Osman.



ANGRY FAN



titter

HAPPY FAN



Archibald Thacker @ArchieDMR Playoff pressure again melts the tiny brain of Coach Dimwit. @HawkeyeDeron goes for it on 4th down in the first half but doesn't with the game on the line.



William E Cotoye @Wile-E Game should not have been this close. Nice play from Ryan to DeVante saves day. Pick up your game #CobbCoyotes!



Iowa City 23 Cobb County 27



	1	2	3	4	F
Iowa City	0	3	7	13	23
Cobb County	10	7	3	7	27

* Playoff * 02-15-2021 Coyote Field Temp:64 Wind:Calm None No Line MVP:Tannehill HF

1	11:08	Cobb County	TD	Tannehill 5 pass to Holtz (McManus) (8-75-3:52)	0-7
1	4:03	Cobb County	FG	McManus 22 (10-65-5:05)	0-10
2	13:22	Iowa City	FG	Tucker 53 (7-8-2:58)	3-10
2	8:12	Cobb County	TD	Tannehill 1 run (McManus) (10-75-5:10)	3-17
3	7:36	Iowa City	TD	Wilson 9 pass to Kirk (Tucker,J) (12-81-7:17)	10-17
3	1:56	Cobb County	FG	McManus 47 (9-46-5:36)	10-20
4	14:42	Iowa City	FG	Tucker 50 (7-28-2:07)	13-20
4	10:26	Iowa City	TD	Mixon 30 run (Tucker,J) (7-55-3:05)	20-20
4	7:51	Cobb County	TD	Tannehill 56 pass to Parker (McManus) (4-80-2:26)	20-27
4	3:37	Iowa City	FG	Tucker 47 (9-46-4:08)	23-27

Player Stats

Passing	Att	Cmp	Yds	25	In	Td	Sk	Rate
Wilson	21	12	105	0	0	1	2	86.4
	21	12	105	0	0	1	2	86.4

Rushing	Att	Yds	Avg	FD	10	Lg	Td
Mixon	20	134	6.7	7	5	30	1
Wilson	4	27	6.8	1	1	14	0
Conner	4	15	3.8	1	1	10	0
Brown	1	2	2.0	0	0	2	0
	29	178	6.1	9	7	30	1

Receiving	No	Dp	Att	Yds	Avg	FD	25	Lg	Td
Beasley	3	0	5	21	7.0	0	0	10	0
Conner	3	0	4	9	3.0	1	0	6	0
Brown	2	0	3	35	17.5	2	0	24	0
Kirk	2	0	2	18	9.0	2	0	9	1
Lockett	2	0	4	22	11.0	1	0	15	0
Olesly	0	1	3	0	0.0	0	0	0	0
	12	1	21	105	8.5	6	0	24	1

Fumbles	No	Rec	Td
	0	0	0

Kick Returns	No	Yds	Avg	Lg	Td
Smythe	2	27	13.5	15	0
Lockett	2	26	13.0	13	0
	4	53	13.3	15	0

Punt Returns	No	Fc	Yds	Avg	Lg	Td
Kirk	1	0	3	3.0	3	0
	1	0	3	3.0	3	0

Kicking	FG	Lg	XP	Pts
Tucker	3-3	53	2-2	11

Punting	No	Yds	Avg	Tb	20	Bk	Lg
Pinion	2	93	46.5	0	0	0	49

Defense	Tkl	Sk	Def	Stf	Hur	FF	Int
Hayward Jr.	10	0	0	0	0	1	0-0
Bouye	9	0	1	0	0	0	0-0
Ogletree	7	0	0	0	0	1	1-6
Hill,B	6	0	0	1	0	0	0-0
Pierre-Paul	4	2	0	0	0	0	0-0
Stone	3	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Jones	3	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Cox	2	1	0	0	2	0	0-0
Johnson,K	2	0	1	0	0	0	0-0
Littleton	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Smythe	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Cashman	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Okwara	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Hargrave	0	0	0	0	1	0	0-0
	50	3	2	1	3	2	1-6

Passing	Att	Cmp	Yds	25	In	Td	Sk	Rate
Tannehill	26	19	293	1	1	2	3	119.6
	26	19	293	1	1	2	3	119.6

Rushing	Att	Yds	Avg	FD	10	Lg	Td
Mostert	13	94	7.2	4	3	21	0
Peterson	10	56	5.6	3	2	10	0
Tannehill	3	7	2.3	2	0	6	1
	26	157	6.0	9	5	21	1

Receiving	No	Dp	Att	Yds	Avg	FD	25	Lg	Td
Parker	7	0	10	147	21.0	6	1	56	1
Jones,J	6	0	7	74	12.3	5	0	17	0
Cook	3	0	3	44	14.7	2	0	17	0
Holtz	1	1	3	5	5.0	1	0	5	1
Peterson	1	0	1	6	6.0	0	0	6	0
Cooks	1	0	2	17	17.0	1	0	17	0
	19	1	26	293	15.4	15	1	56	2

Fumbles	No	Rec	Td
McGovern	1	0	0
Mostert	1	0	0
Jones,J	0	1	0
Tannehill	0	1	0
	2	2	0

Kick Returns	No	Yds	Avg	Lg	Td
Calais	2	15	7.5	9	0
Natson	1	11	11.0	11	0
	3	26	8.7	11	0

Punt Returns	No	Fc	Yds	Avg	Lg	Td
Natson	1	0	5	5.0	5	0
	1	0	5	5.0	5	0

Kicking	FG	Lg	XP	Pts
McManus	2-2	47	3-3	9

Punting	No	Yds	Avg	Tb	20	Bk	Lg
Martin	2	97	48.5	0	1	0	50

Defense	Tkl	Sk	Def	Stf	Hur	FF	Int
Martinez	13	0	1	0	0	0	0-0
Atkins	7	1	1	0	3	0	0-0
Golden	4	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Lawrence	3	0	0	0	1	0	0-0
Nelson	3	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Mullen	3	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Jones,B	3	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Chaisson	2	1	0	0	3	0	0-0
Jenkins	2	0	1	0	0	0	0-0
Basham	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Jacobs	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Core	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Bennett	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Jennings	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
White	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Murray	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
	47	2	3	0	7	0	0-0



Runs for 1 TD and passes for 2 TDs to quarterback Coyotes to victory.

	Iowa City	Cobb County
First Downs	17	26
Rushes	29-178	26-157
Passes	21-12-105	26-19-293
Sacked	2-12	3-17
Fumble	0	2
Penalties	5-38	10-61
Turnovers	0	1
Missed Tackles	8	8
Dropped Passes	1	1
Bad Passes	3	1
Passes 25+	0	1
Runs 10+	7	5
Blitzers	7	7
Time	30:47	29:13
Third Down	6-13	2-6
Fourth Down	0-1	0-0
Red Att/Td/Fg	1/1/0	6/2/2
Net Offense	271	433



3

Brooklin



27

Budapest

TEAM LEADERS

Passing	Cmp	Att	Yds	TD
Carr	30	43	268	0
Rushing	Car	Yds	Avg	TD
Hyde	6	17	2.8	0
Receiving	Rec	Yds	Avg	TD
Hopkins	10	100	10.0	0

Team	1	2	3	4	OT	Total
Brooklin	0	0	0	3	-	3
Budapest	7	10	7	3	-	27

TEAM LEADERS

Passing	Cmp	Att	Yds	TD
Rodgers	14	23	199	2
Rushing	Car	Yds	Avg	TD
Howard	9	72	8.0	1
Receiving	Rec	Yds	Avg	TD
Kittle	5	70	14.0	1

Play of the Game
 In the 1st quarter, 11:04 on the clock, the Hawks with the ball, 3rd & 9 at the Budapest 27, safety **Minkah Fitzpatrick** ambushes a pass from **Derek Carr** and picks it cleanly to end the early threat.

DEFENCE SIZZLES AS STARS WIN!

RODGERS 2 TDs MORE THAN ENOUGH FOR DOMINATING 'D'!

SUMMARY: After dropping both regular season matches to the Hawks and scoring just 22 points total in those losses, the North Stars and their fans were not taking Brooklin lightly heading into this big playoff game. Fortunately for the home fans, the cool, calm and sunny day in Budapest foreshadowed better fortune for the Stars than they had previously experienced. The Budapest defence played one of its strongest games yet, limiting the dangerous offence of the Hawks to just 14 first downs, 259 total yards and 3 points. They took the ball away twice, the first time on a **Minkah Fitzpatrick** red zone interception of **Derek Carr** that slammed the door shut on what had been a fine-looking opening drive, setting the tone for a day of frustration for the visitors. After a pair of three-and-outs to start the day, the slow-starting Budapest offence got on the road to victory with a 63-yard scoring drive that featured a pair of 16-yard passes to **George Kittle**, the second for a touchdown to put the Stars in front, 7-0. Nobody would have believed at the time that they would not need to score again. The Stars struck again on their next series, with **Aaron Rodgers** finding **Stefon Diggs** open on a curl route for 19 yards and finishing off the 75-yard effort with a short hitch to **David Johnson** that turned into a 16-yard scoring play and a 14-0 lead. The Hawks scrambled together a drive that reached the Budapest 36 before going backwards when Carr was sacked for an 8-yard loss by **Cameron Jordan** to bring up 4th & long and a pooch punt to the Budapest 18. The Stars marched back all the way to the Hawks' 7, where the Brooklin defence finally came up with a third down stop to force Budapest to settle for a field goal and a 17-0 halftime lead. The Stars continued to build momentum with a 75-yard touchdown drive to open the 2nd half. A 14-yard completion to Kittle followed by a 32-yard fly to Diggs helped to set up a 5-yard **Jordan Howard** TD run to make it 24-0. The Budapest defence pinned its ears back at this point, with **Terrell Suggs** strip-sacking Carr, who recovered his own fumble, on Brooklin's next series and **Joe Haden** picking off a pass intended for **DeAndre Hopkins** midway through the 4th. The last push for the Hawks brought them to the Budapest 19-yard line where, with 0:27 left, they elected to kick a field goal rather than suffer the shutout.

QUOTES: "The extra game, the long trip, it proved to be too much for us. Not trying to make excuses, but they were well-rested and we were not. I feel like if we had been in our house, this would have gone differently." – Brooklin coach, **Tom Jones**
 "They had a great season and they had our number this year. They deserve a ton of credit for getting here. But I felt like we put it all together in this one. The defence was out to prove something and the offence made enough plays to keep it comfortable." – Budapest coach, **Darrin Jones**.



HAPPY FAN



titter

ANGRY FAN



Bird Man of Brooklin @BirdMan
 #Hawks were grounded before takeoff in this one.



Attila Hun @AttilaHunBWGoulash
 Iron defence, balanced attack. Not Hun style but good for victory under great general @AaronRodgers12



Brooklin 3 Budapest 27

	1	2	3	4	F
Brooklin	0	0	0	3	3
Budapest	7	10	7	3	27



* Playoff * 02-15-2021 Ferenc-Liszt Intl Temp:52 Wind:Calm None No Line MVP:Rodgers

1	2:02	Budapest	TD	Rodgers 16 pass to Kittle (Myers,J) (7-63-3:57)	0-7
2	11:01	Budapest	TD	Rodgers 16 pass to Johnson (Myers,J) (8-75-4:14)	0-14
2	0:14	Budapest	FG	Myers 25 (10-75-3:52)	0-17
3	10:44	Budapest	TD	Howard 5 run (Myers,J) (7-75-4:16)	0-24
4	14:55	Budapest	FG	Myers 33 (12-65-7:40)	0-27
4	0:27	Brooklin	FG	Bullock 37 (11-70-3:52)	3-27

Player Stats

Passing	Att	Cmp	Yds	25	In	Td	Sk	Rate
Carr	43	30	268	1	2	0	4	66.8
	43	30	268	1	2	0	4	66.8

Rushing	Att	Yds	Avg	FD	10	Lg	Td
Hyde	6	17	2.8	0	0	6	0
Breida	1	0	0.0	0	0	0	0
	7	17	2.4	0	0	6	0

Receiving	No	Dp	Att	Yds	Avg	FD	25	Lg	Td
Hopkins	10	0	16	100	10.0	7	0	19	0
Jeffery	7	0	8	65	9.3	4	0	16	0
Engram	4	0	7	16	4.0	0	0	7	0
Scott,B	4	0	4	30	7.5	1	0	12	0
Hyde	2	0	2	7	3.5	0	0	4	0
Cobb	1	0	1	44	44.0	1	1	44	0
Breida	1	0	1	3	3.0	0	0	3	0
Jefferson	1	0	2	3	3.0	0	0	3	0
Perriman	0	0	2	0	0.0	0	0	0	0
	30	0	43	268	8.9	13	1	44	0

Fumbles	No	Rec	Td
Carr	1	1	0
Scott,B	1	0	0
Hudson	0	1	0
	2	2	0

Kick Returns	No	Yds	Avg	Lg	Td
Barner	1	21	21.0	21	0
	1	21	21.0	21	0

Punt Returns	No	Fc	Yds	Avg	Lg	Td
Barner	2	0	4	2.0	3	0
	2	0	4	2.0	3	0

Kicking	FG	Lg	XP	Pts
Bullock	1-1	37	0-0	3

Punting	No	Yds	Avg	Tb	20	Bk	Lg
Scott,J	6	264	44.0	1	1	0	53

Defense	Tkl	Sk	Def	Stf	Hur	FF	Int
Vander Esch	9	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Harrison,R	6	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Jones,J	5	0	1	0	0	0	0-0
Matthews	5	0	0	1	0	0	0-0
Harrison,M	5	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Apple	4	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Simmons	3	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Taylor	3	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
McPhee	2	0	1	0	0	0	0-0
Bates III	2	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Hubbard	2	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Holmes	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Jones,D	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Davis,R	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Adams	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
	50	0	2	1	0	0	0-0

Passing	Att	Cmp	Yds	25	In	Td	Sk	Rate
Rodgers	23	14	199	1	0	2	0	117.8
	23	14	199	1	0	2	0	117.8

Rushing	Att	Yds	Avg	FD	10	Lg	Td
Howard	9	72	8.0	3	2	17	1
Johnson	5	47	9.4	2	2	14	0
Williams	6	38	6.3	2	2	14	0
Taylor,J	4	20	5.0	1	1	10	0
Walton	1	17	17.0	1	1	17	0
Dallas	4	12	3.0	3	0	4	0
Rodgers	2	3	1.5	1	0	2	0
Ozlgbo	2	2	1.0	0	0	2	0
	33	211	6.4	13	8	17	1

Receiving	No	Dp	Att	Yds	Avg	FD	25	Lg	Td
Kittle	5	0	6	70	14.0	4	0	16	1
Diggs,S	4	0	6	69	17.3	2	1	32	0
Johnson	2	0	4	23	11.5	1	0	16	1
Hollister	2	0	3	22	11.0	2	0	14	0
Watkins	1	0	3	15	15.0	1	0	15	0
Williams	0	0	1	0	0.0	0	0	0	0
	14	0	23	199	14.2	10	1	32	2

Fumbles	No	Rec	Td
	0	0	0

Kick Returns	No	Yds	Avg	Lg	Td
Walton	1	0	0.0	0	0
	1	0	0.0	0	0

Punt Returns	No	Fc	Yds	Avg	Lg	Td
Cooper	4	0	27	6.8	9	0
	4	0	27	6.8	9	0

Kicking	FG	Lg	XP	Pts
Myers	2-2	33	3-3	9

Punting	No	Yds	Avg	Tb	20	Bk	Lg
Sanchez	4	171	42.8	0	1	0	56

Defense	Tkl	Sk	Def	Stf	Hur	FF	Int
Haden	10	0	0	0	0	0	1-13
Fitzpatrick	6	0	1	0	0	0	1-0
Suggs	4	1	0	1	0	1	0-0
Robey-Coleman	4	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
McKinney	4	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Hayden	4	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Jordan	2	1	2	0	2	0	0-0
Harris	2	1	1	0	2	0	0-0
David	2	0	1	0	0	0	0-0
Kendricks	2	0	0	0	0	1	0-0
Dean	2	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Campbell	1	1	0	0	3	0	0-0
Long Jr.	1	0	1	0	0	0	0-0
Winovich	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Carter	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
	46	4	6	1	7	2	2-13



Just 199 yards passing, but 2 TD passes under pressure secure win.

	Brooklin	Budapest
First Downs	14	23
Rushes	7-17	33-211
Passes	43-30-268	23-14-199
Sacked	4-26	0-0
Fumble	2	0
Penalties	5-35	3-25
Turnovers	2	0
Missed Tackle	10	2
Dropped Pass	0	0
Bad Passes	0	0
Passes 25+	1	1
Runs 10+	0	8
Blitzers	5	5
Time	28:18	31:42
Third Down	3-11	1-8
Fourth Down	0-0	1-1
Red Att/Td/Fg	1/0/1	5/3/2
Net Offense	259	410



17

Durham



23

Aurora

TEAM LEADERS				
Passing	Cmp	Att	Yds	TD
Allen	24	42	215	1
Rushing	Car	Yds	Avg	TD
Chubb	19	100	5.3	1
Receiving	Rec	Yds	Avg	TD
Kupp	7	64	9.1	0

Team	1	2	3	4	OT	Total
Durham	0	3	7	7	-	17
Aurora	3	10	7	3	-	23

TEAM LEADERS				
Passing	Cmp	Att	Yds	TD
Ryan	12	26	116	2
Rushing	Car	Yds	Avg	TD
Drake	21	120	5.7	0
Receiving	Rec	Yds	Avg	TD
Adams	4	61	15.3	2

Play of the Game

With 0:27 left in the 1st half, Mustangs with the ball at the Durham 30, **Matt Ryan** lofts a bomb into the end zone that **Davante Adams** catches for a TD to give Aurora a 13-3 lead.

MUSTANGS RUN OVER LIZARDS!

DRAKE LEADS 189-YARD AURORA RUSHING ATTACK TO ADVANCE

SUMMARY: The North Division champion Thunder Lizards came to Magna Park in Aurora hoping for better from their offence than the 3-point effort they delivered in their regular season 24-10 loss to the Mustangs. The Durham offence did not start strongly, however, settling for two field goal attempts in their first four possessions and hitting on one of those to generate just 3 points in the first half. On the other side, the Mustangs used the ground game, keyed by **Kenyan Drake** and **Devin Singletary**, to generate two field goal drives in their first four series and build a slim 6-3 mid-way in the 2nd quarter. After **Ed Piniero** missed a 45-yard field goal attempt at the 1:30 mark of the 2nd that would have tied the game at 6, the Mustangs showed the sudden explosiveness they are known for when Drake broke off 3 consecutive carries for a total of 35 yards then **Matt Ryan** lofted a bomb to **Davante Adams** that he hauled-in in the end zone for a 30-yard TD with just seconds remaining in the 2nd quarter. The quick late strike gave Aurora a 13-3 lead at half time and the momentum heading into the 2nd half. Durham's offensive woes continued with a three-and-out to start the 3rd quarter. The Mustangs' offence, playing with a lot of confidence, attempted to go airborne against the elite Thunder Lizards secondary while Durham focused on stopping the run. While not able to produce long-gainers, the Mustangs were able to move the ball steadily, converting a 4th & inches at the Durham 47 and surviving a Singletary fumble at the 7-yard line to go on and score with a Ryan-to-Adams TD pass to make it 20-3. Trailing by 17, Durham finally got into the end zone after an 18-yard run by **Nick Chubb** set up a 6-yard TD pass from **Josh Allen** to **Tyler Boyd**. The Mustangs answered with a drive to the Durham 33 that **Wil Lutz** finished off with a 51-yard field goal to increase their lead to 23-10. The Lizards found success running against the Aurora nickel package, with Chubb carrying the load for 65 yards on 7 carries and scoring from 4 yards out to narrow the Aurora lead to 6 points. The Durham 'D' forced an Aurora three-and-out and the offence took over at their 35. But after gaining two 1st downs the drive fizzled at the Aurora 36 with Allen throwing 4 straight incomplete passes. The Mustangs took over with 2:08 left and ran out the clock to seal the victory.

QUOTES: "That touchdown they scored at the end of the first half haunted us as a team. Eddie missed the field goal then they go all the way back in a minute to score. That's a 10-point swing right there. We're supposed to get over that and we didn't." – Durham coach, **George Kaldis**.
 "It was a tough go out there. They have one of the best defences in the league. The game came down to Kenyan and Matt making a few key plays and, of course, our defence, that does not get enough credit, holding Josh Allen in check." – Aurora coach, **Rich Liotta**.



HAPPY FAN



titter

ANGRY FAN



Sir Reginald @RMClapham
 Jiggered again by the game Mustangs coming off again with flying colours!



James Duthie @efljamesduthie
 No matter how good the #Thunder Lizards are our Mustangs seem to have their number. On to Budapest!



Durham 17 Aurora 23

	1	2	3	4	F
Durham	0	3	7	7	17
Aurora	3	10	7	3	23



* Playoff * 02-15-2021 Magna Park Temp:55 Wind:Calm None No Line MVP:Drake HFA:

1	7:04	Aurora	FG	Lutz 33 (9-51-4:17)	0-3
2	14:55	Durham	FG	Pineiro 30 (14-63-7:04)	3-3
2	9:05	Aurora	FG	Lutz 50 (10-43-5:45)	3-6
2	0:26	Aurora	TD	Ryan 30 pass to Adams (Lutz) (4-65-1:04)	3-13
3	6:18	Aurora	TD	Ryan 7 pass to Adams (Lutz) (14-73-6:59)	3-20
3	0:44	Durham	TD	Allen 6 pass to Boyd (Pineiro) (8-66-2:55)	10-20
4	10:03	Aurora	FG	Lutz 51 (12-42-5:35)	10-23
4	7:27	Durham	TD	Chubb 4 run (Pineiro) (9-75-2:36)	17-23

Passing	Att	Cmp	Yds	25	In	Td	Sk	Rate
Allen,J	42	24	215	0	0	1	0	79.0
	42	24	215	0	0	1	0	79.0

Passing	Att	Cmp	Yds	25	In	Td	Sk	Rate
Ryan	22	12	116	1	0	2	1	99.8
	22	12	116	1	0	2	1	99.8

Rushing	Att	Yds	Avg	FD	10	Lg	Td
Chubb	19	100	5.3	7	5	22	1
Allen,J	3	17	5.7	1	1	17	0
Gibson	1	-1	-1.0	0	0	0	0
	23	116	5.0	8	6	22	1

Rushing	Att	Yds	Avg	FD	10	Lg	Td
Drake	21	120	5.7	9	4	23	0
Singletonary	13	70	5.4	2	2	13	0
Ryan	4	-1	-0.3	0	0	2	0
	38	189	5.0	11	6	23	0

Receiving	No	Dp	Att	Yds	Avg	FD	25	Lg	Td
Kupp	7	0	14	64	9.1	2	0	11	0
Boyd	6	0	8	70	11.7	5	0	17	1
Chubb	6	0	8	22	3.7	1	0	10	0
Hooper	4	0	7	53	13.3	4	0	16	0
Hilton	1	0	4	6	6.0	0	0	6	0
Gibson	0	0	1	0	0.0	0	0	0	0
	24	0	42	215	9.0	12	0	17	1

Receiving	No	Dp	Att	Yds	Avg	FD	25	Lg	Td
Adams	4	0	6	61	15.3	3	1	30	2
Drake	4	0	8	19	4.8	1	0	7	0
Jusczyk	2	0	2	11	5.5	1	0	7	0
Goedert	1	0	1	11	11.0	1	0	11	0
Edelman	1	0	4	14	14.0	1	0	14	0
Washington	0	0	1	0	0.0	0	0	0	0
	12	0	22	116	9.7	7	1	30	2

Fumbles	No	Rec	Td
Chubb	1	1	0
	1	1	0

Fumbles	No	Rec	Td
Singletonary	1	0	0
Brown	0	1	0
	1	1	0

Kick Returns	No	Yds	Avg	Lg	Td
Latimer	1	24	24.0	24	0
	1	24	24.0	24	0

Kick Returns	No	Yds	Avg	Lg	Td
Perine	1	29	29.0	29	0
	1	29	29.0	29	0

Punt Returns	No	Fc	Yds	Avg	Lg	Td
Proche II	3	1	38	12.7	14	0
	3	1	38	12.7	14	0

Punt Returns	No	Fc	Yds	Avg	Lg	Td
Sims	3	0	16	5.3	12	0
	3	0	16	5.3	12	0

Kicking	FG	Lg	XP	Pts
Pineiro	1-2	30	2-2	5

Kicking	FG	Lg	XP	Pts
Lutz	3-3	51	2-2	11

Punting	No	Yds	Avg	Tb	20	Bk	Lg
Morstead	4	192	48.0	0	0	0	52

Punting	No	Yds	Avg	Tb	20	Bk	Lg
Koch	4	201	50.3	0	0	0	53

Defense	Tkl	Sk	Def	Stf	Hur	FF	Int
Davis Sr.	9	0	0	2	0	0	0-0
Warner	8	0	0	1	0	0	0-0
Sherman	7	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Jones	5	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Murphy	4	0	0	0	2	0	0-0
McCourty	4	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Campbell	3	0	0	0	0	1	0-0
Irvin	2	1	0	0	0	0	0-0
Simmons	2	0	1	0	0	0	0-0
Moore II	2	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Robertson	2	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Mathieu	1	0	1	0	0	0	0-0
Young	1	0	0	1	1	0	0-0
Hendrickson	1	0	0	1	0	0	0-0
Turay	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Oliver	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Holmes	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Armstead,A	0	0	0	0	2	0	0-0
	54	1	2	5	5	1	0-0

Defense	Tkl	Sk	Def	Stf	Hur	FF	Int
Peterson	12	0	1	1	0	0	0-0
Williams,K	11	0	0	1	0	1	0-0
Harris	7	0	2	0	0	0	0-0
Boston	4	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Davenport	3	0	2	2	2	0	0-0
Johnson	3	0	0	1	0	0	0-0
Ward	3	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Simmons	2	0	0	1	0	0	0-0
Autry	1	0	1	0	0	0	0-0
Jernigan	1	0	0	0	1	0	0-0
Thompson,T	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Phillips	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Moore Jr.	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Davison	0	0	0	0	3	0	0-0
Watt	0	0	1	0	2	0	0-0
Kendricks	0	0	1	0	0	0	0-0
Onyemata	0	0	0	0	1	0	0-0
	50	0	8	6	9	1	0-0



KENYAN DRAKE
AURORA

21 carries, 120 yards, 9 1st downs.
Explosive running led to key 1st half TD.

Team Stats

	Durham	Aurora
First Downs	20	18
Rushes	23-116	38-189
Passes	42-24-215	22-12-116
Sacked	0-0	1-8
Fumble	1	1
Penalties	6-50	2-15
Turnovers	0	0
Missed Tackles	8	7
Dropped Passes	0	0
Bad Passes	3	1
Passes 25+	0	1
Runs 10+	6	6
Blitzers	10	5
Time	28:27	31:33
Third Down	5-13	3-12
Fourth Down	1-2	1-1
Red Att/Td/Fg	3/2/1	2/1/1
Net Offense	331	297



AROUND THE



With Spats McChad

NEW YORK – This year’s Quarter Final round was a notorious one for all the wrong reasons. But at least none of those reasons involved COVID-19 – the insidious, enigmatic virus with a fatality rate between 1.4% and 0.2% (depending on your source and how the data is counted) that has locked down over half the planet, but seems to have been largely routed by the EFL and its even more mysterious scarab amulet. Don’t get me started...!

The four contests that make up the round were each soiled by controversy of the kind that could call into question the final outcomes. This is a shame because, in my view, all of the “right” teams advanced to the Conference Finals, with the possible exception of Aurora beating out Durham. But then again, the Thunder Lizards put all of their dinosaur eggs into a basket labelled **Josh Allen**, a move all analysts knew would be a risk. As many had insinuated or outright predicted, the immensely talented, but raw as sushi Allen couldn’t throw a pass into the ocean from a raft on his team’s final four downs in their loss this week. A more desultory and disappointing climax you are unlikely to see in a top-billed playoff game.

Setting Allen’s choke under pressure aside, however, Durham fans are up-in-arms about a critical non-call and a blown call that may have tipped the balance in favour of Aurora. Brooklin fans and their coach, **Tom Jones**, are irate about the way the team was treated by Hungarian authorities in the days leading up to the game, treatment that caused them to come out “flat.” Iowa City fans are as angry as country bumpkins can be at both the referees and their own coach in the wake of their loss to Cobb County. And last, but certainly not least, there was the unprecedented and scandalous ‘Delay of Call’ controversy in Virden that caused the league itself to intervene with an unprecedented review *after* the game had officially concluded. Not since Cowtown super-fan **Davey Kochett** ran naked onto the field, in the 2011 Quarter Final between Cowtown and Durham, have we seen such a strange scenario late in the game that could have directly affected its outcome.

DELAY OF CALL

Having put the Convicts out of their misery in deliberate, but unspectacular, fashion in the wildcard round, the Bombers came into Virden with the consolation of knowing that they had yet to play their best football, but were still just one game away from a second consecutive trip to the Conference Final. They knew they *could* win. Few expected they *would* win. So, there was no pressure. The Violators, despite finishing the season with four straight wins and snatching the no.1 overall seed from Cobb County in the final week, had not been truly tested in those games and had stumbled against the last over-500 team they had faced. The Violators and their fans believed they were the best, but proving it carried the weight of great expectations. Unfortunately, for the Violator brand, the ending of their quarter final game against Bruxelles casts a slight pall over their claim that they are the team to beat in the Pacific Conference Final, rather than Cobb County.

But don’t voice that doubt to local fans of the ‘Bad Boys’ of Manitoba football. They are in a surly mood and screaming for some kind of vengeance against the Powers that Be. Having been deprived of the experience of seeing their team live at home during their best regular season on record, the amassed “deplorables” of Western Manitoba and East Saskatchewan, along with the Goths and Punks from main street Winnipeg (who reject the goody-goody Patriots and interloping Crusaders), came together in contravention of province-wide restrictions on public gatherings and staged a rally at the intersection of King Street and the Trans-Canada Highway to protest the Province’s refusal to grant a special permit to allow fans inside **TERRORDOME** for the playoffs.

“COVID-19 is a Winnipeg problem,” **Garth Tumbleton**, who had led a contingent of Violators fans from Brandon to Virden for the rally, explained to a TV reporter at the scene. “Why are we getting these restrictions slapped on us when don’t have any COVID cases? It’s ridiculous! The government is going overboard, as usual.”

This reflected the majority opinion of the approximately 3,000 protestors who disrupted traffic on the trans-Canada highway and littered the ground around Fountain Tire and the parking lot of the Virden Motel with discarded facemasks. All they had to do was glance south across the border at North and South Dakota to see a completely different approach to the pandemic – one that did not appear to be any deadlier than the meagre toll the virus had taken in rural Manitoba. The angry crowd was tacitly egged on by Violators’ owner, Manitoba oil baron, **Vance Barrate**, who wanted fans in the stands. He had arranged for portable toilets and free food for the protesting fans, while being careful in choosing his words when asked to comment on the unrest.

“People are frustrated,” declared the elder Barrate, father of GM and Coach, **Lance Barrate**. “I don’t condone what they are doing, but I can understand why they’re doing it. They want to see their team play. I know it would mean a lot to Lance if they could be in the seats to support his team. My boy has worked hard for this moment. It’s a real shame.”

The Province was unmoved by the demonstration and refused to concede. Instead, with the rabid support of the media, they took the opportunity to scold the protestors, shaming them for their recklessness, likening them to murderers and threatening them with a police crackdown, while at the same time expressing “grave concern” for their safety due to “variants of concern” that were apparently beginning to pop up everywhere. It would have taken several days for the Mounties to gather enough officers together to physically disperse a crowd the size of the one that had taken control of the town’s lifeline to the rest of the country. The protestors, unafraid of the empty threats, were, in turn, unmoved – literally. They stuck around, circling *TERRORDOME* on game day and attempting to make as much noise as humanly possible, hoping to have some effect on the game.

Unlike their firefight back in Week Three, which Virden won 41-33, this game saw both offences labour at different times against defences that were better organized this time. Predictably, the Virden offence laboured less, scoring on three consecutive possessions in a 19-point second quarter to help build a 26-13 lead by late in the third quarter. But the Bombers of 2020 tend to be at their best when backed into a corner. This game was no exception. The maddeningly inconsistent *Jared Goff* connected perfectly with *Chris Godwin* for an 18-yard touchdown pass to open the fourth quarter and bring the Bombers within a touchdown, trailing 26-20. This score, and a sack of *Patrick Mahomes* by *Trey Flowers* on third down on Virden’s subsequent possession that pushed them out of field goal range, set up the dramatic drive that appeared, at its climax, to be setting the stage for a cruel upset. Instead, however, it set the stage for the biggest playoff controversy in league history.

The drive to notoriety began back at the Bombers’ 3-yard line. With 7:35 left in the 4th quarter, thoughts of going the length of the field were not realistic, given how the Violators’ defence had managed to keep the Bombers in check for most of the afternoon. But the Virden defence had been on the field over 27 minutes thus far and had appeared to let up slightly in the last Bruxelles possession. Sensing his opponent may be tiring, or perhaps just wary of the all-too-frequent Goff interception, *Ken Main* led with *Leonard Fournette*, who was handed the ball four straight times to reach the Bruxelles’ 19-yard line, where they faced 2nd & 4. A short completion to *Darren Waller* for 6 yards yielded another first down, but then the Bombers started going backwards, with *Justin Pugh* being flagged for holding in between two incomplete passes from Goff.

Facing 3rd & 20 from their own 15, the safe play for the Bombers would have been a throw underneath to get some more breathing room before punting it away and, hopefully, getting another stop. But the idea of gambling on his defence to stop Mahomes a second time in a row obviously did not appeal to the Bomber coach. Goff took a deep drop back and fired a bolt to *Travis Kelce* as he cut across a gap the deep zone. *Marcus Peters* dove at Kelce’s ankles, but missed, giving the star tight end plenty of green before *Trae Waynes* upended him at the Bombers’ 46-yard line. They had needed 20 yards and Kelce had delivered 31.

“That might turn out to be the play of the game if the Bombers go on to score,” commented colour analyst *Jonathan Vilma* as play-by-play announcer *Kenny Albert* paused to catch his breath after making the thrilling call.

On the Virden sideline, a tense *Lance Barrate* cursed and barked into the microphone on his headset, “Too deep damn it! That was too deep! Keeping the play in front of you doesn’t mean sitting back and watching him get the first down! Smarten up guys!”

The dank and barren echo chamber that is the empty *TERRORDOME* meant everyone could hear the Virden coach lose his temper in uncharacteristic fashion. One could sense the entire defence tensing up with him because, after a momentary recovery with a 2-yard stuff of Fournette, Goff hit Kelce again, this time for 13 yards, and Godwin for 14 yards two plays later to bring up the two-minute warning. The bomber quarterback was notoriously streaky and it looked like he was on a hot streak. The Bombers went back to Fournette for carries of 8 and 5 yards then Goff found Kelce again for 11 yards to bring the ball to the Virden 5, where the Violators were forced to call a timeout with 1:15 remaining. If the Bombers went on to score – and it looked like they were going to – Virden would need time to move the ball into field goal range on their next series.

It was do-or-die time for the Virden defence. The irony was not lost on FOX broadcast team that the fate of the Violators now rested on their defence rather than the offence that had done the most to separate them from the pack throughout the season.

“There’s Patrick Mahomes on the sideline looking fairly helpless at the moment, Jonathan,” observed *Kenny Albert* as the camera panned the Virden sideline, pausing for a close-up of the Virden quarterback staring grimly at the action.

“Patrick’s done his part. It’s the defence’s turn now, Kenny,” Vilma exclaimed. “They have to make a stop or else it could all be over for Virden. Football’s a team sport – your team has two teams and both of them have to produce if you’re going to be a champion!”

The Violator defence that had performed in the shadow of the offence all season dug deep in its moment of truth. Tight coverage forced Goff to throw wide to Kelce in the end zone. On second down, *Leonard Williams* knifed in between *Joel Bitonio* and *Garett Bolles* and tracked down Fournette from behind as he tried to sweep around the corner for a 4-yard loss. Then, on 3rd & goal, Goff was unable to split the zone to Kelce and the pass sailed incomplete, bringing up 4th & goal at the 9-yard line with 0:59 left.

Now it was the turn of the Bruxelles offence to do-or-die. It was the heaviest of moments – the kind of scenario that calls for a very special play – or the play the defence cannot stop. Until the last two passes, it had appeared that the Virden defence could not stop Kelce. But they now appeared ready for him, chipping him at the line and maintaining discipline in the zone. Goff had been unable to time his last throw into that zone. It was unlikely that Fournette would be ignored – one of the linebackers would have his eye on him in case of a draw. The wheels in *Kenny Main*’s head turned furiously as he scanned his play-sheet looking for inspiration.

“I need a perfect play here!” he snapped, his voice echoing in the cavernous, vacant *TERRORDOME*. He turned to his assistant coach, *Nees Neeskin*, a native Belgian who was being groomed to eventually take over the role of offensive coordinator once he learned the rules of American Football. He had been hired as part of a Bomber outreach program to recruit local talent and develop the game in



Bruxelles coach, **Ken Main**, lets it rip on referee **Clete Blakeman** for he and his crew's failure to blow the whistle on an obvious play-clock violation late in the 4th quarter of Bruxelles' 26-20 loss to Virden. The 'Delay of Call' controversy marred a terrific game.

Belgium. Neeskin had been entrusted with the Special Play Sheet – the sheet that contained the secret plays that the Bombers never ran, in order to keep them secret. They were held in reserve for occasions such as this. “Nees, give me the sheet!”

Neeskin stared blankly at Main. In addition to learning the game of football, Nees was still learning English. After a pause, he turned to reserve tight end, *Adam Shaheen* and motioned him to come over. A shocked Shaheen pointed to his chest as if to say, ‘What me?’ The back-up to *Travis Kelce* and *Darren Waller* had seen as much action as one might expect the back-up to best tight-end tandem in the league to see: None. Shaheen had not played a single snap all season – not even on special teams. It was a wonder they bothered to dress him at all. Now he was being called over at the make-or-break point of the Bombers’ season.

“No, not Shaheen! The *sheet!* The special *play sheet!*” an irritated Main growled.

Neeskin’s eyes lit up. “Ahh, the sheet! *[Natuurlijk!]*” he raced over his sports bag, which was sitting under a bench, and after what seemed like an interminably long time, but which actually took about 6 seconds, he produced a large wrinkled piece of paper that Main snatched from his hand with startling savagess.

The Bomber coach studied the sheet intensely. Judging from his expression, it appeared that he had forgotten exactly what the plays were. In desperation, he spat out, “Duvel – Triple Hop – Mosaic – on 9!” The Bombers’ special plays were all named after a special beer brewed by *Duvel-Moortgat*, the Belgian brewery that owned the Bombers. While he may have not have remembered exactly what the play entailed, he knew it was designed for a fourth down doomsday scenario because it was the first play listed under ‘*Fourth and Doom.*’

Goff looked back at the sideline and tapped his helmet. That was the signal to repeat. An exasperated Main shouted out the play, loud enough that everybody on the field could hear. The Violators defenders looked at each other. The captain of the defence, *Nigel Bradham* shrugged his shoulders. Curiously, so did the Bomber quarterback. The Bombers quickly huddled and broke for the line of scrimmage as the play clock ticked down.

“The Bombers are in danger of not getting this play off!” play-by-play announcer, **Kenny Albert** declared in alarm.

“They had better hurry!” chimed in commentator, **Jonathan Vilma** as Goff barked the signals.

What exactly happened after the play clock counted down to zero is still unclear. The only certain thing is that there has never been a play like it in recorded football history, if “play” is even the correct term for it.

With Goff in the shotgun and the running back, Fournette split wide, the play clock very clearly hit zero a full second before center, *Frank Ragnow* hiked the ball. It was so obvious that several players on both sides reacted as if the whistle had blown, including the Bombers’ quarterback. But the whistle had not blown. In apparent disgust, Goff flipped the ball forward with a flick of his wrist, thinking the play was dead. It fluttered up in the air briefly before it was snatched by Fournette, who had doubled back and cut across Goff’s front, believing the play was still on. Fournette, in turn, pitched it back to a startled *Anthony Sherman*, who bobbled the ball as Virden lineman, *Casey Heyward* bore down on him. At that point several players yelled “*FUMBLE,*” obscuring the sound of a tentatively blown whistle from one of the officials. All hell then broke loose as half the players converged toward the vicinity of the Bomber fullback and the other half stood around looking confused. A mad scrum ensued that lasted several seconds before a chorus of whistles definitively blew the play dead.

Despite video footage being available from many angles, it is virtually impossible to tell exactly what happened. The players have their own versions, some verifiable, some not. Only two things are clear: The mass movement of the pile stopped at the Virden 5-yard line; and the ball popped up as if spit from a Nerf gun as the officials sorted out the mass of bodies, making it impossible to tell from the camera view who had ended with possession. Not that possession really mattered on 4th down. The referee, **Clete Blakeman**, made the only decisive gesture of the entire sequence by then signalling forcefully that the ball was heading back the other way. Virden had possession.

“Hold on! Hold on there!” Ken Main bellowed from the Bruxelles sideline, his voice reverberating around the walls of the old insane asylum now known as *TERRORDOME*. What had just happened was fittingly crazy. “What the hell is going on? That play was dead!” The officials huddled together to confer. When they were done, a small contingent, led by Blakeman, strode over to the sideline to speak with the incredulous Bombers’ coach. A lively debate ensued, with Main ripping off his mask and letting loose with a string of invective so appalling it would have embarrassed a drill sergeant. None of it can be repeated here, but at the end of it, Coach Main threw up the red challenge flag with a dramatic flair worthy of a matador waving a red flag at a bull.

This prompted Blakeman to step up and address the “crowd,” which in this case was congregated outside the stadium trying to make sense through their smart phones of what had just transpired. Although still unsure, they knew it was good for the Violators.

“The previous play is not reviewable,” Blakeman announced over the PA. “The ruling on the field is that ball moved forward, on its own, and came to rest just inside the five-yard line of the defending team. As it was fourth down and the line of gain, being the goal line, was not reached, Virden takes over on downs. When we resume play it will be first and ten at the five-yard line.”

This prompted an eruption of cheers from the crowd outside *TERRORDOME* that was audible inside the stadium. **Lance Barrate** made a fist pump gesture in celebration while **Patrick Mahomes** snapped on his helmet and ran onto the field. The Violators were not out of the woods yet. The Bombers had all three of their timeouts remaining and Virden did not have much room to move backwards. But the biggest threat had been avoided and the ball was once again in their control.

There was a surreal quality to the action that followed, however. Viewers, including the broadcast crew, were not fully immersed in it. They were still coming to grips with the play that should not have been.

“This is something...well...it’s something we’ve never seen before,” a befuddled **Kenny Albert** said as he attempted to fill in the space between Bruxelles timeouts with something that sounded intelligent. “The officials have a tough job, but you would think...I mean...the play clock had obviously expired. We could see that up here.”

“I think it’s the right call,” **Jonathan Vilma** advanced unconvincingly. “The whistle didn’t blow – maybe it should have – but it didn’t. It’s a judgement call in that situation. And, as a player, you just can’t give up on a play because you think it should be dead. I mean, sure it’s tough. But that’s football, Kenny!”

The recent trend of broadcasters actively covering up for officials’ incompetence drives me around the bend. They act as if we’re all idiots who need a special education that only they can give us. There was, of course, nothing right about any of what had transpired. The play should have been declared void, the Bombers penalized for delay of game, and another fourth down play run from the Virden 14-yard line. That is pretty much the unanimous view outside of Virden, judging from social media reaction.

The Bombers eventually got the ball back at their own 42 with 0:28 left, but it would come to naught. Goff attempted 3 straight bombs – all incomplete – and ended the game with a check down to **Chris Thompson** that went a piddling 3 yards. The Violators celebrated as Thompson was dragged down and the gun sounded. The game was officially over. Or was it?

In view of the avalanche of negative reaction in the Twittersverse and on sports talk shows everywhere, the EFL decided to step in and take the unprecedented step of suspending the game result and launching their own inquiry. However, this attempt at remedial action also drew public criticism, as well as a legal challenge from an attorney with the Violators, who made the argument that the league cannot protest its own officials – only sanction them. A *team* could file a protest of the result, but neither the Bombers nor the Violators had done so. The Violators were not about to do it. The ball was in the Bombers’ court.

To the great surprise of many, the Bombers elected not to protest the game. In an official statement from Antwerp, headquarters of the *Duvel-Moortgat Brewery*, the team declared: ‘The Bombers Football Team disagrees with the ruling on the field made by EFL Referee Clete Blakeman. There was a clear expiry of the play clock and a delayed whistle in response to that infraction. A conference of officials was held and a decision made that contradicts events on the field. This judgement could be rectified by video review. We understand that expiry of the play clock is not reviewable under the current rules system in place and that without review there is no objective basis upon which to overturn the referee’s judgement. Therefore, for the sake of the integrity of the rules that govern competition in the EFL, the Bombers Football Team declines to launch a protest of its Quarter Finals contest against the Violators.’

A crestfallen **Ken Main** took on much of the blame for the fiasco. “This could have been avoided if I had got the play to Jared on time,” he said softly in the post-game presser. “That part’s on me. I also could have refused to let my team continue playing, but in the heat of the moment I was more concerned with getting the ball back and worried that by not playing we would forfeit. I mean, if we stopped playing every time an official makes a bad call, we’d never finish any games.”

And so the Violators advance under a cloud of controversy that is as unfair to them as it is to the Bombers. The ‘Delay of Call’ undoubtedly affected the natural flow of the game, but whether or not it changed the outcome is unknowable. Nevertheless, the speculative debate about who *would* have won rages in articles, sports talk shows and social media. The Violators had stopped the Bombers on the three previous plays and had Coach Main so rattled that he could not get his play in on time. The momentum certainly had appeared to favour the home team at that point. But there is also the Bombers’ ‘cornered rat syndrome’ to consider. A 4th & goal play from the 14 would have been just the kind of play the cornered rats could have pulled off. But if they had, Mahomes would get the ball back with time to get into field goal range. Who is to say that the Virden quarterback’s burgeoning legacy would not have been buffed to a shine by leading his team to a field goal in the game’s final 45 seconds? Alas, we will never know. All I know, is that any of those scenarios, had they played out, would have been better than the referee-induced boner we are now and forever stuck with.

MARTY

At Coyote Field in Cobb County, the Coyotes passed their first big playoff test by taking down the Cubs, 27-23 in a game marred by a controversial non-call and questionable coaching decisions by Iowa City’s iconic coach and self-improvement guru, **Deron Redding**. The non-call came on what would turn out to be the game-winning touchdown mid-way through the fourth quarter. The Cubs had just tied things up at 20-points apiece on a 30-yard touchdown run by **Joe Mixon**, after trailing the entire game. The Coyotes looked to be in danger of losing their grip on a game they had mostly controlled prior to the final period. Facing 2nd & 3 at their own 44, the Coyotes ran one of the crossing patterns they like to run, where the opposite wide-out and the tight end lead across and sweep away coverage to

create room for the intended target. It was a “phantom pick” that they had used all season to great effect. Teams had either not caught on to it, or had not figured out how to stop it. This time however, the Cubs had the play defended, holding their positions in zone and clogging the path for the no.1 target, **DeVante Parker**. Parker would either have to adjust his route, or **Ryan Tannehill** would have to thread the needle to a moving target – a dangerous throw. Neither alternate option turned out to be necessary, however, because **Jared Cook** bowled over **AJ Bouye**, opening a big window for Tannehill to throw through. The Coyote MVP made no mistake, hitting Parker in stride as the receiver picked up steam, making two defenders miss and bringing it home 56 yards for the touchdown. It was a spectacular play on Parker’s part, but it was also one of those “can’t miss” pass offensive pass interference penalties that had the FOX broadcast team of **Joe Duck** and **Troy Acheman** reacting in real time.

“This one’s coming back,” Acheman declared with finality as Parker crossed into the end zone, his arm holding the ball high above his head in celebration. His booth partner, Duck, agreed. But the joke was on them, because the officials were totally unfazed by the site of Bouye getting flattened 8 yards beyond the line of scrimmage. No flag fell, the play stood and the Coyotes and 2,500 of their lucky fans in attendance at the game celebrated as if nothing untoward had occurred.

An incensed Coach Redding, eyes bugging out of his head, raised his arms high in the air and attempted to get the attention of referee **Jeff Triplette**, who ignored him and carried on with the game. The sense that the refs had it in for him, or just a general feeling of panic at the thought of yet another playoff loss (the Cubs were 4-10 in the post-season) and getting taunted with the name “Marty” during the off-season (after **Marty Schottenheimer**), or a combination of both, may have addled the beloved Cubs’ coach’s brain at the point of decision for what would turn out to be the Cubs’ final series of the 2020 campaign.

Russell “The Magician” Wilson took over with almost eight minutes left on the clock – enough time to score a touchdown, stop the Coyotes coming back the other way, and score again. Wilson had done such things before when he had been let loose. But the Cubs were anything but loose on this, their final drive of the 2020 season. They started off with 3 runs, which netted 25 yards against a pass pre-occupied Coyote defence. It was a good strategy to set up the kill-shot attempt that was about to come.

The Coyotes bit, putting five men on the line of scrimmage in an effort to contain the run and the Cubs went in for the kill. But instead of sending **Tyler Lockett**, **AJ Brown** or **Christian Kirk** to assassinate the Cobb County secondary, Redding called a long slant to tight end, **Will Dissly**, an unrestricted free agent late addition to the team who had caught just 8 balls during the regular season and zero during the current game. The call succeeded in catching the Coyotes off guard. How could it *not* have? The pass was perfectly thrown and Dissly was wide open but the ball careened off his hands, incomplete. Redding buried his face in his hands. Wilson winced. The State of Iowa groaned. The moment had been right; the man for it had been wrong.

After the drop, the Cubs went all-in with the short game, running the ball on three of their next four snaps – the fourth being a short pass by design that went incomplete. This brought up 4th & 5 at the 29, with 3:37 left. Wilson called out for a play, but Redding instead elected to send in **Justin Tucker** to kick the field goal from 47 yards, narrowing the deficit to 4 points.

It was a strange decision at the time, as Acheman pointed out while Tucker jogged onto the field: “This is a bit of a strange decision,” he observed laconically. “Even if Justin Tucker makes the field goal – and he probably will – the Cubs still need to get the ball back and score a touchdown. That’s asking a lot from their defence against the most efficient offence in the league.”

True enough. But had the Cubs’ defence held the Coyotes to three-and-out on their next series and Wilson driven the field for a last-second touchdown for the win, we would probably be lauding Redding for his patience and foresight in that decision to kick the field goal. The fact that the Coyotes proceeded to run the clock out – threatened in that effort only by their own fumbled and recovered snap – turned that potential admiration to scorn at his timidity and abject failure to grasp the urgency of the moment.

“*Coach Bug Eyes, frozen in the spotlight, did the dumb thing yet again,*” was the opening sentence of the *Des Moines Register* article, ‘Cubs Lose Again,’ by Redding’s journalistic nemesis, **Archibald Thacker**.

Cubs’ beat reporter since the team’s inception, **Sparky McGillicuddy**, put out a much more sympathetic piece in *The Iowan*, but still added the line: “*One wonders how this game might have turned out had Coach Redding attempted to go for it on 4th & 5 and let Russell work his magic.*”

Fans in Iowa can wring their hands all they want and blame Redding for their team’s inability to win in the post-season. The criticism is not all without merit. However, the fact is that the Coyotes were the better team and likely would have won anyway. All the same, I still would have loved to see Wilson going for that 4th & 5!

AROUND THE EFL QUARTER FINALS

Criticism from my Editor that my stories are too long, taking up too much space and causing publishing delays, is heating up. I have ignored my Editor in the past, but now friends are gently telling me the same thing. I must therefore make my survey of the remaining two quarter final games relatively short and sweet. Wish me luck!

At Magna Park in Aurora, the EFL referees added a third boner to the playoff blooper reel of botched calls with a doozy in the Mustangs’ 23-17 besting of the Thunder Lizards. It is technically more correct to refer to the trifecta of terribleness as a string of blatantly botched *non*-calls. Don’t be surprised if we eventually learn that the customary memo from the league to the officials prior to the weekend listed, as a “point of emphasis,” to *let the teams play*. In other words: “Don’t call anything stupid.” The unintended consequence of such a direction is that the refs don’t call anything at all; or at least nothing that would draw attention to themselves. This see-no-evil refereeing is probably worse than the ticky-tack kind that disrupts the flow and stretches games out to unbearable lengths. When the refs are calling lots of penalties it sends a message to the players to shape up. When they aren’t calling anything

meaningful, it lets them know that it's okay to cheat. Smart teams will take advantage of that. And Aurora is a smart team.

This contest had a constipated feel about it from the start. An exchange of punts, followed by an exchange of field goals, followed by another Aurora field goal, another exchange of punts, then a field goal attempt for Durham that **Eddie Pineiro** missed. That single sentence sums up the first 28½ minutes of highlight-free action that saw Aurora shuffle out to a 6-3 lead. It was little wonder then that **Pete Morelli** – a referee with a reputation for favouring home teams – kept the flag in his pocket when **Kenyan Drake** turned the corner and bolted forward for the first big play of the day, a 25-yard run from the spot of the missed field goal to the Durham 42-yard line. It was a fine run made finer by the blatant hold by Aurora left tackle **Alejandro Villanueva** on Durham rookie, **Chase Young** that allowed Drake to reach the edge in the first place, followed by the glaring pull of **De'Vondre Campbell's** jersey by **Davante Adams** that slowed down the linebacker just enough to enable Drake to get past him and into a higher gear.

The infractions were so obvious that play-by-play announcer **Ian Hawk** was obliged to point them out as the replay showing Villanueva hauling Young down from behind unwound on the screen in front of millions of viewers. In keeping with the new catechism for dealing with glaring errors by the officials, his booth partner, **Charles Davis** dutifully followed up with the all-too-familiar, “I think that’s a good non-call there, Ian. Sometimes, a referee just has to let the players play.”

The Drake run was the laxative from which flowed the one true highlight of the game: The Bomb from **Matt Ryan** to **Davante Adams** that made All-Pro corner and defensive MVP candidate **Richard Sherman** look like an arthritic old gaffer trying to keep up. It was a great fake and break by Adams and a perfectly thrown ball by Ryan that arced high in the air and settled like mist into Adams’ hands as Sherman stumbled and fell at the goal line. The 30-yard touchdown pass put Aurora in front 13-3 just before the half. The quick major score, after the prolonged sparring for field goals, seemed to snuff out what little spark of spirit the Lizards had brought with them to the stadium of the team they had never beaten.

From there, the game played out with a foreboding listlessness on the Durham side that betrayed their hopelessness. Only the uncharacteristic conservatism, bordering on timidity, of the Mustangs’ offence kept the game close. All the same, the Lizards had more than a fighting chance near the end, trailing by 6 points, with 2:27 left and a new set of downs at the Aurora 36. But they had little fight left in them. This feeling was captured in its essence by the final four snaps of the season – all incomplete passes from a frenetic **Josh Allen** that were either off-target, ill-timed or desperate. In a faint, flatulent poof, Durham’s season was over.

I would love to say that this tightly-played game was a classic chess match won by the better team. But I would be deceiving you. This was a curiously uninteresting, tepid, under-stated game that was generally misplayed by both sides. The defining moment – and in fact the only time the Mustangs actually looked like the Mustangs – was the “non-call” assisted run by Drake followed three plays later by the bomb to Adams. The Lizards, as they had all season, looked like a team searching for an identity. In the end, they weren’t who they thought they were and this awareness nagged at the back of their collective lizard brain, holding them back. On the other side, the team that wins as much out of habit as skill, overcame a talent-deficit and won, as they always seem to do.

To wrap up my Quarter Finals review, I turn finally to the *non-game* at Ferenc-Liszt International Airport Stadium in Budapest, where the well-rested North Stars, fueled by a desire for cruel and certain vengeance against the team that had beaten them twice in the regular season, strangled the low-flying, physically-exhausted Hawks by the restrained, but emphatically lop-sided score of 27-3. This was a constructive shutout of the league’s fifth most efficient offence by the league’s top-ranked defence. The 3 points the Hawks managed were not scored in anger; they were scored in desperation in the dying seconds of the game to avoid the embarrassment of a giant goose egg next to their name in the playoff history books.

This game was a *tour de force* by the Budapest defence, overshadowing a quietly efficient and perfectly balanced performance by the Budapest offence that featured a rotating cast of eight different ball carriers and a working connection between **Aaron Rodgers** and his top receivers, **George Kittle** and **Stefon Diggs**. While the offence slowly piled up points, the defence repeatedly swatted the Hawks down, completely taking away the run game and pressuring **Derek Carr** relentlessly. Yet, for most of the first quarter it appeared that this might be another strange-but-true defensive struggle that had characterized their two meetings in the regular season. The Hawks had started the game with the ball and were moving it like the Hawks do when suddenly **Minkah Fitzpatrick**, reading Carr’s eyes, jumped a crossing route and picked him off at the Budapest 20-yard line. That play set the tone. Although the offence was slow to warm up, when it did it stayed warm, while the defence simply dominated the rest of the game.

Although I was one of the first national journalists to call the Hawks as a contender this year, my admiration for their high morale and economy in getting the most out of pedestrian defensive personnel did not blind me to likelihood that they would hit a wall sooner or later in the playoffs. Their struggle to put down Cowtown in the wildcard round was a foreshadowing of certain doom against a real contender – and a rested one at that. But the Hawks got a raw deal that, while no excuse for losing the game might explain their total lack of competitiveness.

There is a feature-worthy scandal in the way the Hawks were treated by the Hungarian authorities when they arrived days before the game and were directed to a camp built for Turkish refugees. The wave of migrants never came, thanks to **Victor Orbán's** ‘zero refugee’ strategy, but the camp remained open and was being used to intern gypsies and other undesirables who had snuck into the country illegally. The Hawks had been sent there allegedly to prevent the spread of COVID-19. They had been unable to practice apart from two closely monitored 15-minute exercise periods in a large yard, before being bussed to the stadium in a pair of vintage 1976 Csepel lorries two hours before game time. The Hawks lodged a complaint and **Tom Jones** was quick to blame his team’s poor performance on the arrangements. But we all know better. That’s why it’s getting just a measly paragraph from me.

BUG THE BOOKIE!

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FOR CONFERENCE FINAL EFL ACTION

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Jimmy's CONFERENCE FINALS PICKS

PACIFIC CONFERENCE FINAL

COBB COUNTY @ VIRDEN (line – VIOLATORS by 6)

INJURIES: Cobb County – None; Virden – Ben Watson (PROBABLE).

The two undisputed top teams in the Pacific Conference face each other for the first time this season to finally answer the question: Who is best? The Violators were the pre-season favourite to represent the Conference in the Gayle Sayers Game. For the better part of the regular season, however, the Coyotes were the surprise hegemon, until they faltered and surrendered the no.1 seed in Week 16. That little stumble at the end provided proof, to those who had been steadily looking for it, that the emergence of Ryan Tannehill as the best quarterback leading the best team was just a mirage, dispelled like fog in the wind by the pressure of his first meaningful game against a good opponent. But those who may have been snickering at the Tannehill's little swoon in the season's final week had the smiles wiped from their faces with Cobb County's victory over the Cubs in the quarter final round. Beating the legendary Russell Wilson in a playoff game – and throwing a 4th-quarter touchdown pass to do it – is no laughing matter. So, while his previous body of work suggests otherwise, any rational analysis of this game must factor in the Coyote quarterback as being comparable to the best in the business – fully capable of handling the loaded weapons at his disposal in the forms of Julio Jones, DeVante Parker and the deceptively deadly Jared Cook. Working in virtual obscurity to make the Coyote offence the most efficient in the league is their offensive line, anchored on the left side by David Bakhtiari and Joe Thuney. As a result, Tannehill has rarely heard footsteps coming at him from his blind side. Add in a reinvigorated Adrian Peterson and the explosive Raheem Mostert and it should not be surprising that Cobb County was able to dismantle unsuspecting defences at will during the regular season. This offence matches up well against a Virden defence that can hold its own in coverage, but has struggled to contain the run all season and is coming off a humbling experience in both phases against the Bombers in the quarter final round. The controversial ending to that game – with the Bombers failing to get a play in on time when knocking on the door in the Violators' red zone – left the impression that Virden had barely escaped a one-and-done humiliation. If not for the one-man circus act of Patrick Mahomes – who led his team in rushing and threw for over 300 yards – the game could easily have been a blowout in the other direction. The Virden prodigy will need to be at his best this week against the unheralded, but highly effective, Cobb County defence, led by twin lockdown corners, Tre'Davious White and Steve Nelson. As good as Amari Cooper and John Brown are, they will not run so freely through this secondary. That means Ezekiel Elliott will need to make his presence felt behind road-graders Lane Johnson and Marshal Yanda in order to keep the Coyote linebackers honest and less inclined to drop back and block already narrow throwing lanes. Virden cannot rely exclusively on Mahomes' arm to win the day. They also have to possess the ball and they have the beasts up front to win a battle, or at least fight to a draw, against the Coyote front four. I am looking forward to this match-up as a fan of football as much as a professional interested in the outcome. My analysis shows these to be two evenly matched and well-coached teams and, as a result, I see the relatively big line in favour of Virden as an opportunity for smart money. The allure of a dazzling star like Patrick Mahomes at the game's most important position naturally fuels the common belief that he will make short work of a mere professional quarterback like Ryan Tannehill. Mahomes' rare talent could, in the final moments, be the difference in this game. But I would caution you not to disregard the team architecture of the Coyotes that put their unexciting quarterback in a position to be all that he can be. Expect this to be Virden's toughest test. **PICK: COBB COUNTY**

ATLANTIC CONFERENCE FINAL

AURORA @ BUDAPEST (line – MUSTANGS by 2)

INJURIES: Aurora – None; Budapest – None.

Many, including me, expected Durham to be flying to Budapest to decide which of the league's top two defences would emerge as the 'Iron Curtain' of 2020 football. In retrospect, it was a foolish notion to discount the three-time champion Mustangs for the sole reason that they lack the essential talent, across all levels, usually associated with the league's elite teams. Apart from Jason Kelce and JJ Watt, the Mustangs are not very imposing in the trenches on either side of the ball. Even JJ is not nearly 'watt' he used to be at his peak. With rapidly ageing veterans in the secondary stepping aside for the steady, but quite human, K'Waun Williams; and Eric Hendricks suddenly one of the best players on the defence, the Mustangs have no business among the league's top five defences – a position they hold largely because of the pitiful offences of the South Division. Nevertheless, here they are, battling it out with a true heavyweight in the penultimate game. That is because they still have Matt Ryan, Davante Adams, an incredibly slippery Kenyan Drake and a coach in Rich Liotta who does not quit. This perseverance is reflected in key situational statistics; such as opponent's third down conversion rate (27.8%), second best only to this Budapest defence, and keeping opponents out of the end zone (18.6 points allowed per game) while finding a way into their opponent's end zone (7.4% TD pass rate & 26.6 points per game). Sometimes, of course, fortune simply favours the bold, and fortune has a way of shining on the Mustangs at the right moment. They carry a winning culture on to the field with them; a certain mystique that may have had something to do with them holding off a Durham push at the end in their victory last week – the Thunder Lizards have never beaten the Mustangs and they know it. The North Stars, on the other hand, have memories (albeit dimming ones) of winning a championship and are known for possessing a team culture unique to themselves, centered around the "dawg-ed" personality of their coach, Darrin Jones. The fierce competitor inside the Budapest coach found its outlet this year in the defence, the league's top-rated unit in terms of efficiency and points allowed. They refuse to yield when pushed up against the wall, giving up touchdowns inside the red zone just 27.3% of the time, first in the league by a very wide margin. Moored at both ends of the defensive line by the elite tandem of Calais Campbell and Cameron Jordan, and captained at the second and third levels by linebacker, Lavonte David and safety, Minkah Fitzpatrick, this unit has proven more than any offence can handle. When it met Matt Ryan and the Mustangs in Week Two this year, it held the Mustangs to just 7 points; the lowest point total ever for a Rich Liotta-led Mustangs squad. While nobody expects that degree of success to be replicated twice, the Mustangs could double their previous output in this game and still find themselves on the losing end of the ledger. It may not take a great deal of improvement on the part of the Aurora offence, however, in order to find themselves once again heading to the league final. The Budapest "attack" (if that is the right word to use to describe their offence) has been erratic all season under a relatively error-free, but painstakingly conservative and un-explosive Aaron Rodgers. The aerial game has not been productive, despite the coach being committed, as always, to establishing the run to set up play action. The problem is that the Budapest ground game is missing both that bell-cow back to tire opponents and the breakaway speed associated with danger. Opponents are simply not worried about Jordan Howard and Jamaal Williams and focus on stopping Rodgers as a result. The weapons at his disposal have also not proven to be of the calibre many had predicted they would be. Stefon Diggs will occasionally stretch the field for a long score, but with just 42 catches on the season he can hardly be considered a true no.1 wide receiver. George Kittle has been the go-to guy in the passing game, but his season long catch of just 24 yards tells you all you need to know about how contained he has been after the catch. And this is why – if you were curious – the Mustangs are surprisingly favoured on the road in this one. I don't agree with it, but those are the reasons. Expect them to not matter when the dust settles. **PICK: BUDAPEST**



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This Week in EFL History
 With Professor
Sterling Smitherman

FROM THE EFL ARCHIVES – The Quarter Finals round of the 2014 EFL season did not produce much suspense. The closest game yielded an 11-point differential in favour of the Carthage Cannibals over the Twin Cities Triumph. The Cannibals' 31-20 victory had been partly foreseen in the five-point spread favouring them, but the Triumph were a popular underdog pick, as it was felt that after two losses to the Cannibals during the regular season, they were "due." Interestingly, the Cannibals had hosted the Triumph in Week 16 in a game that decided the East Division, making this a rare back-to-back winner-take scenario. In the end,

Triumph QB, *Jay Cutler* threw his mandatory 2 interceptions, the first to set up a Carthage TD and *Philip Rivers* threw the game-winning TD to *Doug Baldwin* with 7 minutes left to make the Cannibals advance.

The much anticipated 'Greek showdown' between the Spartans and the Lizards at Jurassic Park turned ugly for the Spartans after a failed 4th & 1 gamble at their own 40 early in the game set up a Durham TD. The momentum shifted permanently from that point and Durham went on to win handily, 42-20.

With *RGIII* listed as 'questionable' before the game, the idea of *Matt Flynn* starting at QB for the Banana Sluggs had many people thinking the Convicts would pull off an upset. But *RGIII* played, passing for 215 yards and 2 TDs and rushing for 69 yards; while the defence held the Convicts to just 1 of 14 third down conversions in a runaway 38-11 Santa Clara win.

And finally, the Mustangs covered the 16-point spread with a 34-10 blowout of the Regulators. For one quarter at least, the Regs fought hard, leading 7-3 before a 21-point outburst by the Mustangs mid-way through the 2nd quarter made it 24-7 at half time. South Carolina never recovered from the shock and the Mustangs' perfect season continued.