

2016

10

Est. 2007

QUARTER



EFL

ELITE FOOTBALL LEAGUE

Celebrating our 10th year of football excellence

February 19, 2017

2016

10

Est. 2007

FINALS

EAST



BROOKLIN 28



LOS ANGELES 20



MARKHAM 20



GWINNETT 18



IOWA CITY 27



TWIN CITIES 31

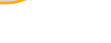
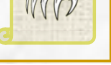


AURORA 23



SEBASTIAN 35

NORTH



CENTRAL



WEST



ALEX SMITES CUBS!

Alex Smith

Brooklin QB *Alex Smith* is tackled by Cubs' CB *Stephon Gilmore* at the end of a 26-yard scramble in 4th quarter playoff action in Iowa City. The 3rd down run kept the drive alive, enabling Smith to later connect with *DeAndre Hopkins* for what would turn out to be the winning TD in a huge quarter final upset.



Who was slick in the Quarter Finals?

"BRYLCREEM" THE EFL'S FIRST SPONSOR



DeAndre Hopkins
WR
Brooklin Hawks

10 Rec, 173 yds, 2 TDs. 38-yard TD catch in 4th proved game-winner.



Bradley Roby
CB
Twin Cities Triumph

1 T, 1 PD, 1 INT (0 yds). Diving INT was big break that helped turn game.



28

Brooklin



27

Iowa City

TEAM LEADERS				
Passing	Cmp	Att	Yds	TD
Smith	19	24	242	2
Rushing	Car	Yds	Avg	TD
Stewart	12	53	4.4	1
Receiving	Rec	Yds	Avg	TD
Hopkins	10	173	17.3	2

Team	1	2	3	4	OT	Total
Brooklin	0	7	7	14	-	28
Iowa City	10	10	0	7	-	27

TEAM LEADERS				
Passing	Cmp	Att	Yds	TD
Wilson	19	23	205	3
Rushing	Car	Yds	Avg	TD
Austin	5	80	16.0	0
Receiving	Rec	Yds	Avg	TD
Randle	5	74	14.8	0

Play of the Game

In the 4th quarter, trailing 27-21, with 1:09 left, **Alex Smith** threw it 10 yards over the middle to **DeAndre Hopkins**, who broke into the open field and took it 38 yards for the winning TD.

HOPKINS, SMITH COME UP BIG IN UPSET! CONTROVERSIAL PLAY-CALL ENDS CUBS SEASON!

SUMMARY: It was a calm but cold day at sold out Joe Ferguson Stadium, where the home town Cubs took the field as full touchdown favourites against the East Division titlist, Brooklin Hawks. The Cubs had prevailed in their regular season match-up, running away with the game in the 4th quarter. The locals were loud, proud and expecting a win. Things got off to a good start for the home team: they marched 70 yards on the opening drive and cashed in on a 9-yard TD pass from **Russell Wilson** to **Tavon Austin**. After a quiet three-and-out by the Hawks, the Cubs drove to the border of the red zone but had to settle for a 38-yard **Jason Myers** FG to make it 10-0 after one quarter of play. The Hawks rebounded: **Alex Smith** connected on a 47-yard bomb to **DeAndre Hopkins**, setting up a 4-yard TD run by **Jonathan Stewart** to make it 10-7; but the Cubs regained the momentum by mounting a grueling 15-play, 93-yard TD drive capped by a 6-yard TD pass to **Tyler Lockett** to make it 17-7. The Cubs forced another three-and-out then churned out another long drive to the Brooklin 1 yard line, where they opted for a FG as time expired to take a 20-7 half time lead. Brooklin opened the 2nd half with their own long drive, covering 80 yards in 15 plays and finishing with Hopkins collaring a short curl in the end zone to make it 20-14, Cubs. But the home team countered with a long, run-dominated drive, featuring carries of 13 and 18 yards by Austin, to extend their lead to 27-14 on a 13-yard out pass to Lockett. The Hawk's first series of the 4th quarter lasted 12 plays and yielded a 5-yard TD run on a dive up the gut by **Ryan Mathews**. Leading by 6, the Cubs broke into Hawks' territory with a 43-yard run by Austin. But three consecutive running plays netted 0 yards and the Cubs punted the ball back to Brooklin. With 3:56 left, the Hawks started at their 20. A 3rd down scramble for 26 yards by Smith brought them across mid-field and 4 plays later he hit Hopkins across the middle for a 38-yard TD pass with 1:09 left. The Cubs set out from their 33 trailing by 1. Using the rest of their timeouts they got into FG range at the Hawks' 29 with 0:18 left. They tried to get a little closer. An incomplete pass burned 5 seconds then they ran Austin on a sweep to the outside. But **Brent Grimes** tackled him in-bounds and time expired before Wilson could spike the ball.

QUOTES: "Alex Smith does not get enough credit in this league. He came through in the clutch today against a very good defence. He and DeAndre were giants for us." – Brooklin coach, **Tom Jones**.

"Our runs to the right side had been working all day behind Jared and Gabe. I was confident Tavon could get out of bounds on that play. Credit their defence for being there and holding him up. This one is on me." – Iowa City coach, **Deron Redding**, on the play-calling in the final series.



HAPPY FAN



titter

ANGRY FAN



Tom Jones @SirTomJones
Thanks for the support. It is nice, but not unusual, for me to be associated with a winner!



Archibald Thacker @ArchieDMR
Complete Idiocy! Redding ought to be fired! But I have said that before.



Brooklin 28 Iowa City 27



	1	2	3	4	F
Brooklin	0	7	7	14	28
Iowa City	10	10	0	7	27

* Playoff * 02-17-2017 Temp:33 Wind:Calm None No Line MVP:Hopkins HFA:ON(0)

1	9:42	Iowa City	TD	Wilson 9 pass to Austin (Myers,J) (9-70-5:12)	0-7
1	1:55	Iowa City	FG	Myers 38 (9-45-5:33)	0-10
2	14:23	Brooklin	TD	Stewart 4 run (Parkey) (5-74-2:27)	7-10
2	5:15	Iowa City	TD	Wilson 6 pass to Lockett (Myers,J) (15-93-9:03)	7-17
2	0:00	Iowa City	FG	Myers 19 (10-61-4:15)	7-20
3	5:07	Brooklin	TD	Smith 9 pass to Hopkins (Parkey) (15-80-9:53)	14-20
4	14:50	Iowa City	TD	Wilson 13 pass to Lockett (Myers,J) (9-73-5:11)	14-27
4	7:58	Brooklin	TD	Mathews 5 run (Parkey) (12-80-6:52)	21-27
4	1:09	Brooklin	TD	Smith 38 pass to Hopkins (Parkey) (7-80-2:54)	28-27

Player Stats

Passing	Att	Cmp	Yds	25	In	Td	Sk	Rate
Smith	24	19	242	2	0	2	2	136.5
	24	19	242	2	0	2	2	136.5

Passing	Att	Cmp	Yds	25	In	Td	Sk	Rate
Wilson	23	19	205	1	0	3	3	143.4
	23	19	205	1	0	3	3	143.4

Rushing	Att	Yds	Avg	FD	10	Lg	Td
Stewart	12	53	4.4	4	2	16	1
Smith	5	33	6.6	3	1	26	0
Mathews	1	5	5.0	1	0	5	1
Williams,K	1	5	5.0	0	0	5	0
	19	96	5.1	8	3	26	2

Rushing	Att	Yds	Avg	FD	10	Lg	Td
Austin	5	80	16.0	3	3	43	0
Wilson	9	74	8.2	5	5	12	0
Hill	11	51	4.6	4	1	16	0
Proise	6	29	4.8	0	0	9	0
McKinnon	5	17	3.4	0	1	13	0
Sankey	1	9	9.0	0	0	9	0
Miller,B	1	0	0.0	0	0	0	0
	38	260	6.8	12	10	43	0

Receiving	No	Dp	Att	Yds	Avg	FD	25	Lg	Td
Hopkins	10	0	11	173	17.3	8	2	47	2
Jeffery	3	0	4	25	8.3	0	0	11	0
Gronkowski	3	0	5	23	7.7	0	0	9	0
Stewart	2	0	3	10	5.0	1	0	6	0
Williams,K	1	0	1	11	11.0	1	0	11	0
	19	0	24	242	12.7	10	2	47	2

Receiving	No	Dp	Att	Yds	Avg	FD	25	Lg	Td
Randle	5	0	7	74	14.8	4	1	30	0
Lockett	5	0	5	52	10.4	4	0	14	2
Austin	4	0	4	32	8.0	2	0	10	1
Williams	3	0	3	22	7.3	1	0	8	0
Miller,B	1	0	2	6	6.0	0	0	6	0
Miller,H	1	0	1	19	19.0	1	0	19	0
McKinnon	0	0	1	0	0.0	0	0	0	0
	19	0	23	205	10.8	12	1	30	3

Fumbles	No	Rec	Td
	0	0	0

Fumbles	No	Rec	Td
	0	0	0

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

Kick Returns	No	Yds	Avg	Lg	Td
Lockett	3	76	25.3	32	0
Davis	2	38	19.0	24	0
	5	114	22.8	32	0

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

Punt Returns	No	Fc	Yds	Avg	Lg	Td
Lockett	1	1	1	1.0	1	0
	1	1	1	1.0	1	0

Kicking	FG	Lg	XP	Pts
Parkey	0-0	0	4-4	4

Kicking	FG	Lg	XP	Pts
Myers	2-2	38	3-3	9

Punting	No	Yds	Avg	Tb	20	Bk	Lg
Masthay	2	90	45.0	0	0	0	48

Punting	No	Yds	Avg	Tb	20	Bk	Lg
Anger	1	39	39.0	1	0	0	39

Defense	Tkl	Sk	Def	Stf	Hur	FF	Int
Grimes	11	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Jenkins	9	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Demps	8	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Tuitt	6	2	0	0	0	0	0-0
McCoy	5	1	0	1	1	0	0-0
Golden	5	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Foster	4	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Williams,B	3	0	0	0	1	0	0-0
Burfict	3	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Matthews	3	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Apple	2	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Jackson	2	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Byrd	2	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Fairley	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Tapper	0	0	0	0	1	0	0-0
	64	3	0	1	3	0	0-0

Defense	Tkl	Sk	Def	Stf	Hur	FF	Int
Gilmore	6	0	1	0	0	0	0-0
Jones	4	0	2	0	0	0	0-0
Pierre-Paul	4	0	0	1	1	0	0-0
Richardson	4	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Hayward	4	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Barwin	3	0	1	0	0	0	0-0
Cox	3	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Ryans	3	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Hughes III	2	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Wilkerson	1	1	0	0	1	0	0-0
Miller III	1	1	0	0	0	0	0-0
Harris	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Taylor	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Matakevich	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
	38	2	4	1	2	0	0-0



10 catches, 173 yards, 2 TD including game-winner. Not a bad day!

	Brooklin	Iowa City
First Downs	18	24
Rushes	19-96	38-260
Passes	24-19-242	23-19-205
Sacked	2-11	3-26
Fumble	0	0
Penalties	3-20	3-16
Turnovers	0	0
Missed Tackles	10	5
Dropped Passes	0	0
Bad Passes	1	2
Passes 25+	2	1
Runs 10+	3	10
Blitzes	0	3
Time	25:20	34:40
Third Down	5-8	9-13
Fourth Down	1-1	1-1
Red Att/Td/Fg	3/3/0	4/3/1
Net Offense	327	439



20

Los Angeles



31

Twin Cities

TEAM LEADERS				
Passing	Cmp	Att	Yds	TD
Bridgewater	26	48	319	2
Rushing	Car	Yds	Avg	TD
Gore	18	74	4.1	0
Receiving	Rec	Yds	Avg	TD
Cooks	7	151	21.6	2

Team	1	2	3	4	OT	Total
Los Angeles	0	7	6	7	-	20
Twin Cities	7	17	0	7	-	31

TEAM LEADERS				
Passing	Cmp	Att	Yds	TD
Palmer	17	30	274	2
Rushing	Car	Yds	Avg	TD
Martin	19	86	4.5	1
Receiving	Rec	Yds	Avg	TD
Matthews	4	127	31.8	1

Play of the Game
 In the 2nd quarter after a Knights' three-and-out and with the Triumph up 14-7, **Antonio Brown** returned a **Sam Martin** punt 74 yards for a TD.

TRIUMPH BREAK KNIGHTS TO ADVANCE! ROBY PICK, BROWN PUNT RETURN PIVOTAL IN 2ND QUARTER BARRAGE

SUMMARY: The Triumph had been perfectly triumphant through 16 regular season games. But the post-season re-set meant starting over. The young Triumph had never won a post-season game in two attempts; and this week they faced a resurgent Knights' team built on a defence that had forced 5 turnovers in their last meeting. Nobody – home town fans or Triumph players – was taking this game for granted, despite being favoured by 10 points. From the outset, that Knight defence looked primed to play. The Triumph faced a tight and swarming defence and went three-and-out on their first possession. LA took over at their 28 and marched down the field but hit a wall at the Triumph 2 yard line. On 4th and 1 they opted to gamble and **Frank Gore** was stoned for no gain. The stop energized the home side. **Carson Palmer** hit **Rishard Matthews** for 38 yards to get the Triumph out of the hole and soon they were in field goal range. But a **Julius Peppers** sack pushed them back to the 34 and brought up 4th & 20. Incredibly, the Triumph went for it and made it, thanks to a 17-yard pass interference penalty on **Sean Lee**. Two plays later **Doug Martin** cut around the corner for a 17-yard TD run and a 7-0 Triumph lead. The Knights responded with a 76-yard drive, tying the game on a 17-yard TD pass from **Teddy Bridgewater** to **Brandin Cooks**. But the game turned suddenly when **Bradley Roby** picked off Bridgewater at the LA 10 yard line. A 10-yard TD pass to **Tyler Eifert** put the Triumph in front; then a 74-yard punt return for a TD by **Antonio Brown** extended the lead to 21-7. The Knights' subsequent drive was snuffed out by a **Ziggy Ansah** sack on 3rd down. Taking over at their 20 with 2:59 left in the half, a 37-yard pass to Matthews and a 22-yard slant to **Shane Vereen** led to a Triumph FG and a 24-7 half time lead. The Knights' D managed to keep the explosive Triumph offence contained in the 3rd quarter but the offence could manage only a pair of **Greg Zuerlein** FGs to pull within 11. However, the dam broke on the Triumph's next series. Palmer connected on back-to-back long slants of 31 yards to Vereen and 47 yards to Matthews, the latter finding the end zone, to vault the Triumph out in front 31-13. A 70-yard TD pass to Cooks at the 2:34 mark was too little too late for the Knights and the Triumph extended their perfect run.

QUOTES: "We got some explosive plays and our defence held in the red zone. They had a good game plan for Antonio but Shane and Rishard stepped up. It felt like a closer game in the 2nd half than the final score indicates. We still have areas to improve!" – Twin Cities coach, **Guy Williams**.
 "We were in this to win, not to show, so of course I am disappointed. But I am also proud of this team. Teddy's development this year was phenomenal. With our QB position finally mature, we are well positioned for a deeper run next year." – LA coach, **Jeff Dohrn**.



ANGRY FAN



titter

HAPPY FAN



Sir Dancelot @DancelotLA
 Teddy's popping puppet after that TD was ace but a big FAIL on the post-pick pout.



Molly @Mollyqerim
 Amazing! **@AntonioBrown84** just one catch but his presence still felt with punt return TD!



Los Angeles 20 Twin Cities 31



	1	2	3	4	F
Los Angeles	0	7	6	7	20
Twin Cities	7	17	0	7	31

* Playoff * 02-18-2017 Wilhalla Stadium Temp:70 Wind: No Line MVP:Martin

1	2:09	Twin Cities	TD	Martin 17 run (Aguayo) (11-98-6:17)	0-7
2	12:37	Los Angeles	TD	Bridgewater 17 pass to Cooks (Zuerlein) (9-76-4:26)	7-7
2	8:43	Twin Cities	TD	Palmer 10 pass to Eifert (Aguayo) (3-10-0:23)	7-14
2	7:41	Twin Cities	TD	Brown 74 punt return (Aguayo)	7-21
2	0:26	Twin Cities	FG	Aguayo 30 (10-68-2:41)	7-24
3	6:29	Los Angeles	FG	Zuerlein 32 (12-41-4:51)	10-24
3	1:15	Los Angeles	FG	Zuerlein 31 (13-48-4:09)	13-24
4	13:12	Twin Cities	TD	Palmer 47 pass to Matthews (Aguayo) (5-80-3:03)	13-31
4	2:34	Los Angeles	TD	Bridgewater 70 pass to Cooks (Zuerlein) (4-98-1:47)	20-31

Player Stats

Passing	Att	Cmp	Yds	25	In	Td	Sk	Rate
Bridgewater	48	26	319	1	1	2	2	80.1

Passing	Att	Cmp	Yds	25	In	Td	Sk	Rate
Palmer	30	17	274	4	0	2	5	109.6

Rushing	Att	Yds	Avg	FD	10	Lg	Td
Gore	18	74	4.1	5	0	9	0
Bridgewater	5	42	8.4	4	2	17	0
Perkins	8	40	5.0	3	0	9	0
Total	31	156	5.0	12	2	17	0

Rushing	Att	Yds	Avg	FD	10	Lg	Td
Martin,D	19	86	4.5	5	3	17	1
Vereen	4	18	4.5	1	1	20	0
Total	23	104	4.5	6	4	20	1

Receiving	No	Dp	Att	Yds	Avg	FD	25	Lg	Td
Cooks	7	0	11	151	21.6	6	1	70	2
Barnidge	7	0	16	72	10.3	3	0	17	0
Parker	3	0	3	29	9.7	1	0	17	0
Matthews	2	1	6	27	13.5	1	0	14	0
Gore	2	0	4	16	8.0	1	0	9	0
Burton	2	1	3	7	3.5	0	0	6	0
Taylor	1	0	1	4	4.0	0	0	4	0
Fleener	1	0	2	7	7.0	0	0	7	0
Perkins	1	0	2	6	6.0	0	0	6	0
Total	26	2	48	319	12.3	12	1	70	2

Receiving	No	Dp	Att	Yds	Avg	FD	25	Lg	Td
Vereen	5	0	6	66	13.2	3	1	31	0
Matthews	4	0	6	127	31.8	3	3	47	1
Martin,D	4	0	5	49	12.3	3	0	17	0
Eifert	1	0	4	10	10.0	1	0	10	1
Brown	1	1	6	11	11.0	1	0	11	0
Wheaton	1	0	1	14	14.0	1	0	14	0
Clay	1	1	2	-3	-3.0	0	0	0	0
Total	17	2	30	274	16.1	12	4	47	2

Fumbles	No	Rec	Td
Bridgewater	1	1	0

Fumbles	No	Rec	Td
Palmer	2	0	0
Vasquez	0	1	0
Boling	0	1	0
Total	2	2	0

Kick Returns	No	Yds	Avg	Lg	Td
Young	1	23	23.0	23	0

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

Punt Returns	No	Fc	Yds	Avg	Lg	Td
Cooks	3	0	8	2.7	4	0

Punt Returns	No	Fc	Yds	Avg	Lg	Td
Brown	2	0	73	36.5	74	1

Kicking	FG	Lg	XP	Pts
Zuerlein	2-2	32	2-2	8

Kicking	FG	Lg	XP	Pts
Aguayo	1-1	30	4-4	7

Punting	No	Yds	Avg	Tb	20	Bk	Lg
Martin	3	139	46.3	1	1	0	52

Punting	No	Yds	Avg	Tb	20	Bk	Lg
Jones	5	222	44.4	0	2	0	50

Defense	Tkl	Sk	Def	Stf	Hur	FF	Int
Orakpo	6	2	0	0	1	1	0-0
Sheard	5	0	0	0	1	0	0-0
Lee	5	0	1	1	0	0	0-0
Peppers	4	2	1	0	0	1	0-0
Bennett	4	1	0	0	0	0	0-0
Hargreaves	4	0	2	0	0	0	0-0
Amerson	4	0	1	0	0	0	0-0
Amos	3	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Bucannon	3	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Woodson	2	0	1	0	0	0	0-0
Baker	1	0	0	0	1	0	0-0
Wilcox	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Vaccaro	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Nassib,C	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Total	44	5	6	1	3	2	0-0

Defense	Tkl	Sk	Def	Stf	Hur	FF	Int
Harris Jr.	13	0	1	0	0	0	0-0
Hughes	10	0	0	1	3	0	0-0
Wagner	9	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Slay	7	0	4	0	0	0	0-0
Ansah	4	1	0	0	2	0	0-0
Searcy	4	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Freeman	3	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Lee	3	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Melton	2	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Crawford	2	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Banks	2	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Casey	1	1	0	0	1	1	0-0
Roby	1	0	1	0	0	0	1-0
Maxwell	1	0	1	0	0	0	0-0
Martin,K	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Total	63	2	7	1	6	1	1-0



86 yards and a 17-yard TD run to get his team started against tough LA 'D'

	Los Angeles	Twin Cities
First Downs	26	19
Rushes	31-156	23-104
Passes	48-26-319	30-17-274
Sacked	2-12	5-34
Fumble	1	2
Penalties	4-37	3-15
Turnovers	1	0
Missed Tackles	8	7
Dropped Passes	2	2
Bad Passes	1	2
Passes 25+	1	4
Runs 10+	2	4
Blitzes	37	20
Time	32:13	27:47
Third Down	5-15	6-14
Fourth Down	3-5	1-2
Red Att/Td/Fg	4/1/2	3/2/0
Net Offense	463	344



20



23

Markham

Aurora

TEAM LEADERS				
Passing	Cmp	Att	Yds	TD
Taylor	20	36	193	2
Rushing	Car	Yds	Avg	TD
Johnson	6	60	10.0	0
Receiving	Rec	Yds	Avg	TD
Diggs	9	116	12.9	2

Team	1	2	3	4	OT	Total
Markham	7	3	3	7	-	20
Aurora	0	10	7	6	-	23

TEAM LEADERS				
Passing	Cmp	Att	Yds	TD
Ryan	20	30	217	1
Rushing	Car	Yds	Avg	TD
Drake	12	124	10.3	0
Receiving	Rec	Yds	Avg	TD
Boldin	8	80	10.0	1

Play of the Game
 With Aurora leading 20-13 with 8:58 left in the 4th and Markham driving, **Karlos Dansby** intercepted **Tyrod Taylor** at the Aurora 16 to snuff out the scoring chance and set up a Mustangs FG drive.

CROSBY KICKS STARS OUT OF POST-SEASON! 56-YARD FG ENDS UP BEING DIFFERENCFE IN SLUGFEST!

SUMMARY: On a windy but unseasonably warm day in Aurora, the EFL's most dominant team over the past three seasons played host to the 2012 Champion Markham North Stars. The Stars were hoping for a better start than they had had in their regular season loss to Aurora this year: a 27-0 silencing built on a 21-point 1st quarter. They got their wish when linebacker **D'Qwell Jackson** foiled an early Mustang red zone opportunity with a replay challenge interception of **Matt Ryan** at the Stars' 10. The offence did the rest, driving 90 yards on the strength of a 20-yard run by **Christine Michael** and effective passing by **Tyrod Taylor** to break the ice with a 14-yard TD pass to **Stefon Diggs**. The Mustangs responded on their next series; they covered 93 yards, with Ryan hitting on 6 of 7, including a 30-yard strike to **Julian Edelman**, to set up a 1-yard TD run by **Mike Tolbert**. Taylor caught the Mustangs off guard with an 18-yard dive up the middle and **David Johnson** followed with a 13-yard run to help set up a 26-yard **Josh Brown** FG. But Aurora tied the score at 10 before the half thanks to a 49-yard punt return by **Kaelin Clay** with 0:49 left that set up a 44-yard **Mason Crosby** FG. The Stars began the 2nd half with the ball but punted it back to the Mustangs after just one first down. Rookie **Kenyan Drake** started the ensuing drive with a 25-yard run off tackle and Ryan finished it off with a 10-yard hitch to **Anquan Boldin** in the end zone to put Aurora in front, 17-10. The kickers traded long FGs with a 48-yard Brown FG being outdone by a wind-assisted 56-yard FG by Crosby to make it 20-13. The Stars pushed back and got into field goal range with a clutch 4th down completion to Diggs. But three plays later, **Michael Thomas** tipped a pass from Taylor and replay showed that **Karlos Dansby** snared it before it hit the ground for a momentum-shifting pick. Drake broke another big run, 33 yards, to penetrate the Markham red zone and set up a 36-yard Crosby FG, his third of the game, making it 23-13. Needing two scores, Markham chugged back with a 33-yard run by **David Johnson** leading to a FG attempt. But a botched snap squandered the chance and the Stars burned up all their timeouts on the ensuing Aurora three-and-out. The Stars mounted a frantic drive, scoring on a deep pass to Diggs with 0:09 left, but ran out of time.

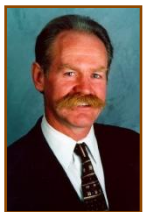
QUOTES: "We followed our game plan and kept it close. They made a couple more plays than we did. We missed some plays we don't usually miss. Credit their defence for really limiting our big guns. The better team won and earned their victory." – Markham coach, **Darrin Jones**.
 "It was pretty much the kind of game we expected. We got off to a fast start on them last time but we had no false impression that this would be easy. They controlled the ball well. We were fortunate to get that pick in the 4th quarter. If they score there, who knows?" – Aurora coach, **Rich Liotta**.



ANGRY FAN



HAPPY FAN



Lanny McDonald @economistsunlm
 Okay I'll say it. I've had a few! Tyrod SUCKED pretty BAD when they NEEDED HIM!



James Duthie @efljamesduthie
 Kenyan Drake is the surprise of this season. Definitely the MVP of this game!



Markham 20 Aurora 23



	1	2	3	4	F
Markham	7	3	3	7	20
Aurora	0	10	7	6	23

* Playoff * 02-18-2017 Candlestick Park Temp:53 Wind:15-25 None No Line MVP:Drake

1	3:36	Markham	TD	Taylor 14 pass to Diggs (Brown,J) (13-90-7:33)	7-0
2	12:06	Aurora	TD	Tolbert 1 run (Crosby) (12-93-6:23)	7-7
2	5:23	Markham	FG	Brown 26 (12-72-6:33)	10-7
2	0:29	Aurora	FG	Crosby 44 (4-0-0:17)	10-10
3	8:25	Aurora	TD	Ryan 10 pass to Boldin (Crosby) (7-65-3:14)	10-17
3	4:07	Markham	FG	Brown 48 (8-30-4:14)	13-17
4	14:16	Aurora	FG	Crosby 56 (9-42-4:44)	13-20
4	5:03	Aurora	FG	Crosby 35 (9-67-3:51)	13-23
4	0:09	Markham	TD	Taylor 33 pass to Diggs (Brown,J) (8-67-1:19)	20-23

Player Stats

Passing	Att	Cmp	Yds	25	In	Td	Sk	Rate
Taylor	36	20	193	1	1	2	1	77.7
	36	20	193	1	1	2	1	77.7

Rushing	Att	Yds	Avg	FD	10	Lg	Td
Johnson	6	60	10.0	3	2	33	0
Taylor	7	51	7.3	4	3	18	0
Michael	10	48	4.8	3	1	20	0
Ellington	2	13	6.5	1	0	7	0
Hightower	6	6	1.0	0	0	5	0
Ervin	1	3	3.0	0	0	3	0
Brown	1	-6	-6.0	0	0	0	0
	33	175	5.3	11	6	33	0

Receiving	No	Dp	Att	Yds	Avg	FD	25	Lg	Td
Diggs,S	9	0	13	116	12.9	8	1	33	2
Thomas	3	1	6	22	7.3	0	0	9	0
Marshall	2	1	8	15	7.5	1	0	8	0
Reed	1	0	2	8	8.0	0	0	8	0
Dunbar	1	0	1	7	7.0	0	0	7	0
Fowler	1	0	1	3	3.0	0	0	3	0
Ellington	1	0	1	6	6.0	1	0	6	0
Johnson	1	0	2	7	7.0	0	0	7	0
Foster	1	0	1	9	9.0	0	0	9	0
Sharpe	0	0	1	0	0.0	0	0	0	0
	20	2	36	193	9.7	10	1	33	2

Fumbles	No	Rec	Td
Brown	1	0	0
Taylor	1	0	0
Thomas	0	1	0
Johnson	0	1	0
	2	2	0

Kick Returns	No	Yds	Avg	Lg	Td
Johnson	2	66	33.0	39	0
Ervin	3	43	14.3	19	0
	5	109	21.8	39	0

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

Kicking	FG	Lg	XP	Pts
Brown	2-2	48	2-2	8

Punting	No	Yds	Avg	Tb	20	Bk	Lg
Bosher	2	96	48.0	0	0	0	53

Passing	Att	Cmp	Yds	25	In	Td	Sk	Rate
Ryan	30	20	217	1	1	1	1	85.0
	30	20	217	1	1	1	1	85.0

Rushing	Att	Yds	Avg	FD	10	Lg	Td
Drake	12	124	10.3	5	5	33	0
Jennings	5	16	3.2	2	1	10	0
Tolbert	4	11	2.8	3	0	5	1
Artis-Payne	1	0	0.0	0	0	0	0
Ryan	2	-2	-1.0	0	0	0	0
	24	149	6.2	10	6	33	1

Receiving	No	Dp	Att	Yds	Avg	FD	25	Lg	Td
Boldin	8	1	10	80	10.0	4	0	13	1
Edelman	7	1	10	90	12.9	4	1	30	0
Coleman	2	0	3	25	12.5	2	0	14	0
Drake	1	1	4	10	10.0	0	0	10	0
Jennings	1	0	1	5	5.0	0	0	5	0
Tolbert	1	0	1	7	7.0	1	0	7	0
Wilson	0	0	1	0	0.0	0	0	0	0
	20	3	30	217	10.9	11	1	30	1

Fumbles	No	Rec	Td
	0	0	0

Kick Returns	No	Yds	Avg	Lg	Td
Drake	2	50	25.0	40	0
Coates	1	3	3.0	3	0
	3	53	17.7	40	0

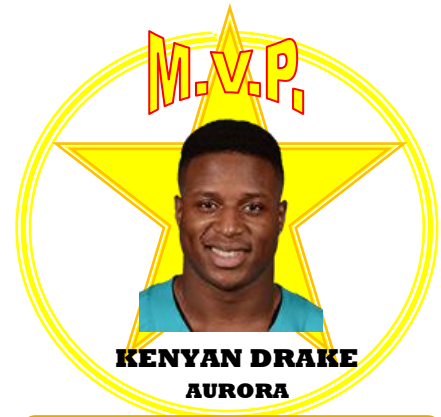
Punt Returns	No	Fc	Yds	Avg	Lg	Td
Clay	2	0	51	25.5	49	0
	2	0	51	25.5	49	0

Kicking	FG	Lg	XP	Pts
Crosby	3-4	56	2-2	11

Punting	No	Yds	Avg	Tb	20	Bk	Lg
Koch	1	50	50.0	0	0	0	50

Defense	Tkl	Sk	Def	Stf	Hur	FF	Int
Revis	8	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Alford	5	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Jack	5	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Jackson	4	0	1	0	0	0	1-0
Williams,T	4	0	1	0	0	0	0-0
Woodyard	4	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Williams,D	4	0	0	1	0	0	0-0
Jordan	3	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Campbell	2	1	0	1	0	0	0-0
Iloka	2	0	1	0	0	0	0-0
Logan	2	0	0	2	0	0	0-0
Hall	2	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Diggs,Q	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
McKinney	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Alexander	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
	48	1	3	4	0	0	1-0

Defense	Tkl	Sk	Def	Stf	Hur	FF	Int
Bowman	7	0	0	1	0	0	0-0
Peterson	7	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Weddle	6	0	1	0	0	1	0-0
Thomas,E	6	0	0	1	0	1	0-0
Watt	4	0	2	0	1	0	0-0
Thomas,M	4	0	2	0	0	0	0-0
Dansby	4	0	1	0	0	0	1-0
Jenkins	4	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Avril	3	1	0	1	0	0	0-0
Jackson	3	0	0	0	2	0	0-0
Bailey	3	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Norman	3	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Thompson	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Brooks	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Williams,K	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Robinson	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
	58	1	6	3	3	2	1-0



12 carries, 124 yards and big runs when his team needed them.

	Markham	Aurora
First Downs	21	23
Rushes	33-175	24-149
Passes	36-20-193	30-20-217
Sacked	1-5	1-8
Fumble	2	0
Penalties	6-47	4-17
Turnovers	1	1
Missed Tackles	8	6
Dropped Passes	2	3
Bad Passes	5	0
Passes 25+	1	1
Runs 10+	6	6
Blitzes	23	0
Time	33:11	26:49
Third Down	7-15	3-9
Fourth Down	2-3	1-1
Red Att/Td/Fg	3/1/1	5/2/1
Net Offense	363	358



18



35

Gwinnett

Sebastian

TEAM LEADERS

Passing	Cmp	Att	Yds	TD
Big Ben	19	39	231	2
Rushing	Car	Yds	Avg	TD
Landry	1	18	18.0	0
Receiving	Rec	Yds	Avg	TD
Landry	7	50	7.1	2

Team	1	2	3	4	OT	Total
Gwinnett	7	0	8	3	-	18
Sebastian	7	18	3	7	-	35

TEAM LEADERS

Passing	Cmp	Att	Yds	TD
Dalton	32	43	367	4
Rushing	Car	Yds	Avg	TD
Forsett	9	82	9.1	1
Receiving	Rec	Yds	Avg	TD
Beckham	9	150	16.7	2

Play of the Game

With Sebastian leading 13-7 and 5:04 left in the 2nd quarter, **Odell Beckham Jr** got behind the Gwinnett safety and took a long hitch from **Andy Dalton** the rest of the way for a 30-yard TD catch.

SWORDFISH IMPALE GLADS!

ANDY DALTON THROWS 4 TDs IN FISH'S FIRST PLAYOFF WIN

SUMMARY: They came to the Fish Tank from across the Sunshine State to witness the first playoff game in the history of the Sebastian franchise and, with it, the rebirth of professional football in their backyard. That rebirth had officially occurred 4 years earlier when the Swordfish had entered the EFL as an expansion team. But years of struggle had kept attendance low. While not quite as dominant as the best Dragons teams of the EFL's early years, at 14-1-1 the Swordfish of 2016 were close enough to inspire fans starving for a winner and now more than Sebastian locals cared. The new winning formula in Florida was on full display early after a jittery opening exchange. **Adam Vinatieri** pushed a 44-yard FG attempt wide right for a disappointing end to the opening drive. Then an obsession with stopping **LeSean McCoy** opened the door for **Big Ben** to go 7 of 8 for 61 yards and a TD on the Glads' first series, giving the visitors a 7-0 lead. This would be a temporary setback. The Swordfish immediately went on the attack. **Andy Dalton** was dialed in on the ensuing drive, completing 6 of 6 for 80 yards and a 16-yard TD pass to **Doug Baldwin** to tie it. A 31-yard strike to **Kenny Stills** to open the Glads' next possession suggested that an intense firefight was in the offing. But Gwinnett did not move another foot. A 51-yard FG attempt by **Cairo Santos** was wide left, signalling a downturn in fortune for the Glads. The Swordfish offence continued to surge like a tidal wave over a dizzy Gwinnett defence. **Odell Beckham Jr** finished off a 4-play drive with a 23-yard catch-and-run for a TD to make it 13-7. Then Sebastian followed up on consecutive Glads' three-and-outs with back-to-back TD drives; Dalton finishing the first with a 30-yard long hitch to Beckham; and **Justin Forsett** dodging around right tackle for an 8-yard TD run to close out the half with Sebastian holding a commanding 25-7 lead. The Glads rebounded in the 3rd quarter with a 48-yard pass play to **Jeremy Maclin** that set up Landry's second TD catch and a successful 2-point convert to make it 25-15. After trading FGs on the next two series the Glads were very much in the game with 5:43 left when **Delvin Breaux** picked off Big Ben at the Glads' 48. The Fish delivered the mortal blow after a time-consuming 7-play drive with a 6-yard hitch to Forsett for a TD and the win.

QUOTES: "Yeah, it's nice to finally make the playoffs and get a win. It hurts so good! But the post-season goes on, long after the thrill of winning is gone. We're just a team doing the best we can. It's time to get ready for the Mustangs." – Sebastian coach, **Russ Lemmon**.
"I'm not going to make any excuses for us. After we grabbed the early lead they beat us all over the place. I've never seen LeSean shut down like that. They are really clicking right now. I don't know if anyone can beat them!" – Gwinnett coach, **Dave Birdsall**.



ANGRY FAN



titter

HAPPY FAN



Jenn Brown @JennLBrowne
Torn! Sad for my Glads! Florida roots making me proud of the Fish.



Jean Boisvert @JB-SwamplandP
Playoff football returns to the state with a big bang! Not saying Fish are better than Dragons. Saying they are more exciting!



Gwinnett 18 Sebastian 35



	1	2	3	4	F
Gwinnett	7	0	8	3	18
Sebastian	7	18	3	7	35

* Playoff * 02-14-2017 The Fish Tank Temp:76 Wind: No Line MVP:Dalton H

1	3:52	Gwinnett	TD	Roethlisberger 1 pass to Landry (Santos) (9-66-5:05)	7-0
1	0:51	Sebastian	TD	Dalton 16 pass to Baldwin (Vinatieri) (6-80-3:01)	7-7
2	12:25	Sebastian	TD	Dalton 23 pass to Beckham Jr. (no good) (4-59-1:38)	7-13
2	5:04	Sebastian	TD	Dalton 30 pass to Beckham Jr. (2 - failed) (12-77-6:03)	7-19
2	0:20	Sebastian	TD	Forsett 8 run (2 - failed) (8-75-3:24)	7-25
3	7:37	Gwinnett	TD	Roethlisberger 5 pass to Landry (2 - Daniels) (6-63-3:	15-25
3	1:49	Sebastian	FG	Vinatieri 27 (13-71-5:44)	15-28
4	12:25	Gwinnett	FG	Santos 26 (11-43-4:13)	18-28
4	2:03	Sebastian	TD	Dalton 6 pass to Forsett (Vinatieri) (7-48-3:40)	18-35

Player Stats									
Passing	Att	Cmp	Yds	25	In	Td	Sk	Rate	
Roethlisber	39	19	231	2	1	2	1	73.8	
	39	19	231	2	1	2	1	73.8	

Passing	Att	Cmp	Yds	25	In	Td	Sk	Rate	
Dalton	43	32	367	2	0	4	2	130.7	
	43	32	367	2	0	4	2	130.7	

Rushing	Att	Yds	Avg	FD	10	Lg	Td
Landry	1	18	18.0	1	1	18	0
McCoy	5	7	1.4	0	0	5	0
Roethlisber	2	-19	-9.5	0	0	0	0
	8	6	0.8	1	1	18	0

Rushing	Att	Yds	Avg	FD	10	Lg	Td
Forsett	9	82	9.1	5	3	22	1
Anderson	13	77	5.9	5	3	17	0
Dalton	5	11	2.2	1	0	9	0
Bolden	1	0	0.0	0	0	0	0
	28	170	6.1	11	6	22	1

Receiving	No	Dp	Att	Yds	Avg	FD	25	Lg	Td
Landry	7	0	11	50	7.1	4	0	12	2
Maclin	5	0	16	110	22.0	5	1	48	0
McCoy	4	0	6	24	6.0	1	0	8	0
Stills	2	1	4	38	19.0	1	1	31	0
Daniels,O	1	0	1	9	9.0	0	0	9	0
Chandler	0	0	1	0	0.0	0	0	0	0
	19	1	39	231	12.2	11	2	48	2

Receiving	No	Dp	Att	Yds	Avg	FD	25	Lg	Td
Beckham Jr.	9	0	13	150	16.7	8	2	30	2
Baldwin	8	0	10	100	12.5	6	0	23	1
Watson	6	0	9	51	8.5	2	0	13	0
Anderson	3	0	3	24	8.0	1	0	11	0
Amendola	2	0	2	19	9.5	0	0	10	0
Forsett	2	0	3	14	7.0	1	0	8	1
Walford	2	0	3	9	4.5	1	0	6	0
	32	0	43	367	11.5	19	2	30	4

Fumbles	No	Rec	Td
Roethlisber	1	1	0
Landry	1	0	0
Lee,K	0	1	0
	2	2	0

Fumbles	No	Rec	Td
	0	0	0

Kick Returns	No	Yds	Avg	Lg	Td
Ellington	3	72	24.0	36	0
Landry	2	33	16.5	22	0
Reddick	1	14	14.0	14	0
Bailey	1	12	12.0	12	0
	7	131	18.7	36	0

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

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

Punt Returns	No	Fc	Yds	Avg	Lg	Td
Amendola	2	1	22	11.0	14	0
	2	1	22	11.0	14	0

Kicking	FG	Lg	XP	Pts
Santos	1-2	26	1-1	4

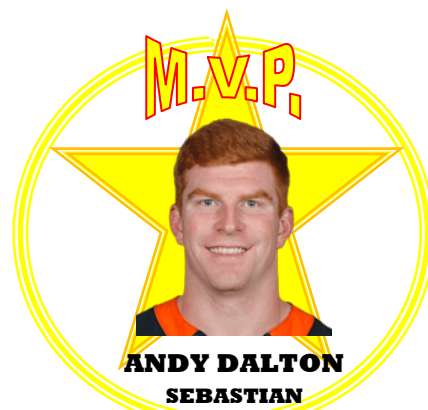
Kicking	FG	Lg	XP	Pts
Vinatieri	1-3	27	2-3	5

Punting	No	Yds	Avg	Tb	20	Bk	Lg
Lee,A	3	136	45.3	0	0	0	48

Punting	No	Yds	Avg	Tb	20	Bk	Lg
Berry	1	44	44.0	0	1	0	44

Defense	Tkl	Sk	Def	Stf	Hur	FF	Int
Smith,S	10	0	2	0	0	0	0-0
Mauluga	8	0	1	1	0	0	0-0
Pryor	8	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Smith,J	7	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Beasley Jr.	6	1	1	0	3	0	0-0
Kendricks	5	0	0	2	0	0	0-0
Brown,M	3	0	1	0	1	0	0-0
Greenway	3	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
McLendon	2	0	0	0	1	0	0-0
Burnett	2	0	1	0	0	0	0-0
Daniels,M	1	1	0	0	0	0	0-0
Reddick	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Goode	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Hayden	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Butler	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Bell	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
	60	2	6	3	5	0	0-0

Defense	Tkl	Sk	Def	Stf	Hur	FF	Int
Posluszny	8	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Breaux	3	0	1	0	0	0	1-0
Brooks	3	0	1	0	0	0	0-0
Chung	3	0	1	0	0	0	0-0
Attaochu	3	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Worley	2	0	1	0	0	0	0-0
Clowney	2	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Perry	2	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Jones	1	1	1	0	0	0	0-0
Colvin	1	0	3	0	0	0	0-0
Dunlap	1	0	0	1	2	0	0-0
Thumond	1	0	1	0	0	0	0-0
Abdul-Quddu	1	0	0	0	0	1	0-0
Floyd	1	0	0	1	0	1	0-0
Jackson III	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
Dixon,B	1	0	0	0	0	0	0-0
	34	1	9	2	2	2	1-0



32 of 43, 367 yards and 4 TDs. Prolific sniper in rout of Glads.

	Gwinnett	Sebastian
First Downs	12	32
Rushes	8-6	28-170
Passes	39-19-231	43-32-367
Sacked	1-4	2-16
Fumble	2	0
Penalties	7-55	5-35
Turnovers	1	0
Missed Tackles	6	2
Dropped Passes	1	0
Bad Passes	3	1
Passes 25+	2	2
Runs 10+	1	6
Blitzes	12	12
Time	21:12	38:48
Third Down	4-11	5-14
Fourth Down	1-2	3-3
Red Att/Td/Fg	3/2/1	4/3/1
Net Offense	233	521



AROUND THE

10

EFL

10

With Spats McChad

NEW YORK – It's Beer Week in New York City and I am busy indulging one of my favourite hobbies: beer drinking. Actually, Beer Week does not officially kick off until Friday, February 24th, at the Brooklyn Expo Center. But in order to get the most out of Beer Week one must be able to consume lots of beer. So I am getting in shape by drinking at least 8 beers a day for a week prior to the opening ceremonies. The good news is that I have had no trouble meeting my daily goal. In fact, I often exceed it, as I did this weekend at Johnny Utah's on West 51st Street in Manhattan while watching the EFL Playoffs. So if you detect that some of my football analysis might be "coloured" by the amber hue of *Brooklyn Lager* or the white haze of *Blue Moon*, you are right! And unlike **Lanny McDonald**, I can actually string a sentence together when I've had a few.

Two of the following articles were written while I was "spirited away" by over-consumption of barley ambrosia. One was written while enduring God's punishment for over-staying my welcome in the "spirit world." Can you guess which one?

ARE YOU KIDDING ME?

Football will not remember much about the Cubs of 2016. But frustrated football fans in the State of Iowa will remember them as a pack of lazy, pampered prima donnas whose principal achievement was raising everyone's hopes high then dashing them like a Muscatine melon hurled from the top of Hawkeye Point.

I am no Cub fan – as Iowans know – but even *I* thought 2016 would be their year. And I was good with that; the Cubs, as a franchise, had paid their dues. While they did not have the *complete* package, they possessed enough talent to win a Championship in a year when *no* team had the complete package. Plus they had **Russell Wilson** – the Little Quarterback That Could (and almost always Did) – to make up for any shortcomings, real or imagined. Wilson can *almost* walk on water and very *nearly* turn water into Budweiser; that is the perception in the Broccoli State and among Cubs' fans around the continent.

The rest of the Cubs, however, are 'Generation Snowflake' in pads. They even looked like snowflakes on Saturday as they sprinted onto the Joe Ferguson Stadium turf in their road whites to resounding cheers from the sold out home crowd. The decision to go with the road unis at home was the decision of **Dr. Rodney Alberhasky Jr.**, the EFL's only fulltime 'Field Wellness Coordinator.' This was, in his words, "*to facilitate a sense of well-being in the team that allows them to realize their natural abilities and cope with stress.*" The Cubs, for some reason, had gone 8-0 on the road and 4-4 at home; they were the only division winner to lose so many games in their own house. Nobody was sure why, but Dr. Alberhasky had a theory:

"In the familiar and familial environment of the home stadium, the players crave the approval of their fans, who assume a symbolic, father figure status," he explained in an interview with **Sperl Sponefritter** on *'Sperl's World of Sports.'* "In this environment, the players are not focusing solely on playing the game. One eye is always on the father (fans), seeking feedback. Unlike the mother (coaches), the father (fans) does not give his love and approval unconditionally. This increases the team's anxiety as they can never be sure of the father's (fans') love and support."

Decoded, this means that the Cubs were overly sensitive to negative feedback, like booing. Or, more correctly, the *prospect of booing*; as Cubs' fans are famous for being among the most supportive in the league. It would appear hostility from other teams' fans brings out the best in the Cubs, while the prospect of their own fans not loving them makes them wet their pants. This made the first round home field advantage they had worked hard to earn not much of an advantage at all. The hope was that dressing them as if they were on the road would bring out some of that 'road warrior.'

A lot of time and money had been poured into keeping the fragile self-esteem of the Cubs' young roster intact. The latest theories and methods had been employed to promote inclusion and eliminate exclusion. Cubs players were never "*cut*" or "*benched*;" they were placed "*in transition*" or moved to "*first string starter support.*" Game film review consisted of all the plays that worked and none of the plays that didn't, to prevent embarrassment. Plays and formations were 'decomplexified' down to their most basic elements then 're-decomplexified' to even simpler forms in order to prevent "mental injury" and to enable "natural reflexivity" to occur on the field unfettered by conscious thought. And, of course, Coach **Deron Redding** took the blame for everything that went wrong – both publicly and in the locker room – a practice that had initially endeared him to the few veterans on the team familiar with harsher coaching regimes.

However, by 2016, according to my sources, taking responsibility was bringing Redding more contempt than respect. The younger players, Cubs since birth, shielded from criticism and constantly praised, came to really believe that Redding was responsible for all their mistakes and resented him for it: "Coach, you have to stop f%king up," **Charone Peake**, a rookie with 5 snaps under his belt, had told him after a recent loss. Then added ominously: "Or we'll have to take matters into our hands."

That may have been exactly what happened in the dying minutes of the Cubs' shocking 28-27 loss to the Brooklin Hawks. There is no other explanation for it, unless one is willing to believe one of the following: that Redding is a complete idiot (like **Archibald Thacker** of the *DesMoines Register*); that he froze in the big moment (like **Will Simons**, ESPN); or thought he had one timeout remaining (like **Bucky "Papa Bear" McCready** of AM 1100 THE-IOWA). **Sparky McGillicuddy** of *The Iowan*, the journalist usually in the best position to know Redding's mind, did not focus his post-game piece on the Cubs' final drive, making just a passing reference to **Russell Wilson** needing "just a little more time" to complete his magic act.

If you missed the game, didn't watch the post-game coverage, and therefore don't know what I'm talking about, I'll draw a picture for you. But first, let's dial it back to the beginning:

The Brooklin-Iowa City contest was the late Saturday night game, coming after the one-sided debacle that was the Swordfish skewering of the Gladiators (more on that later). I was hoping for a better contest but was not counting on it. As impressive as the Hawks had been at decimating sub-par defences all season, they had looked no better than average against the better ones (the Week 8 annihilation of Durham being the exception), and the Cubs had one of the better defences in the league. Then there was their embarrassingly deficient defence – one that had surrendered over 400 points, 168 in the 4th quarter. It was a given in my mind that whatever good the Hawks did in the first three quarters would be undone in the 4th by Wilson. But I intended to stay at Johnny Utahs and watch it all regardless. There was beer to drink and drunken football fans to eavesdrop on and converse with.

The first half was almost all Cubbies. They led 20-7 and had made it look pretty easy. The offence was running right through the Hawks' decrepit defence and Wilson had completed 13 of 14 passes, 2 for TDs, in amassing 269 yards of total offence. It felt like they should have been leading by more, but the decision to settle for a field goal on 4th and goal at the 1 yard line with 19 seconds left in the half had seemed like the right call at the time.

On the other side, the only sign of life from the loudly trumpeted Hawks' offence had been a 47-yard bomb to **DeAndre Hopkins** that had set up a 4-yard **Jonathan Stewart** TD run. Apart from that, they had been forcefully shut down. If I had not been intent on sampling the entire 'Brooklyn' line of beers that night I would have left at half time, settled in to watch past episodes of Grey's Anatomy and reviewed the game tape later.

It would appear that I had forgotten in my drunken haze that a lot can change during half time.

A very relaxed and overconfident Cubs squad took to the field in the 3rd quarter and gradually lost its grip on the game. A ground 'n pound opening series by the Hawks covered 80 yards in what felt like a gazillion plays. I needed to take a pee in the middle of the drive so I scooted to the washroom after they called a holding penalty on **Andrew Whitworth** near mid-field. (I thought I could afford to miss the inevitable punt). But when I came back the Hawks still had the ball and were threatening inside the Iowa City 10. I asked a guy at the bar wearing a Wrecking Balls cap what I had missed.

"They completed a big pass over the middle. Hopkins was wide open," the guy (who I would later discover was named Mitch) replied. "I don't know what the Cubs are doing. They aren't getting any pressure on Smith. Why don't they blitz?"

"The Cubs don't blitz much – never have," I replied. "They play it straight most of the time."

Mitch briefly looked at me and started to say something, but didn't. He turned back to the big screen just in time to see **Alex Smith** drop back three steps and fire a bullet to Hopkins in the end zone for a touchdown. Hopkins had sprinted nine yards and had stopped on a dime inside the goal line while **Stephon Gilmore** carried on a step. It was an uncontested catch. "Sh\$t!" Mitch blurted.

"Cubs fan?" I asked, totally discounting the Wrecking Balls cap on his head.

"Nah!" he answered as **Cody Parkey** kicked the extra point to make it a 6-point game. "I bet on them. I figured they were good for 7 points against this team."

"They still could be. Wait until the fourth quarter!" I declared with a guffaw. "Or maybe not," I added.

I sensed at that point that the game had turned, however. Even after the Cubs answered with a touchdown to re-establish their two-score lead, 27-14, I knew that it was far from over. Mitch on the other hand was already calling a blowout. "The Cubs are gashing them on the ground," he exclaimed. "Brooklin's going to be exhausted by the fourth quarter."

"Yes, but the Cubs can't stop the Hawks either," I observed. Mitch chuckled, as if he thought I was being funny.

I spent a good part of the rest of the game imparting tiny gems of wisdom to Mitch from my vast treasure of football knowledge. For the most part they were lost on him. Mitch is one of those fans who believe they know a lot about football because they played the game in college. He didn't think he could learn anything from me. He looked at the Cubs and saw better players. He saw Russell Wilson versus Alex Smith and saw a mismatch. He saw that the Cubs had blasted the Hawks by 18 points in the regular season. He saw they were at home. How could he miss?

They were all valid points, of course, but anyone could see them. The problem was that he did not see anything else. He did not see that the gap between the teams was in reality not so wide. He underestimated Smith and his ability to peck a defence to distraction if it did not challenge him physically or mentally.

On defence the Cubs were playing their typical passive style, relying on strong fundamental play from mostly two basic formations. They were not attempting to fool the Hawks. They were daring them to make plays, confident that they would make more. The strategy had worked well in the first half while the adrenaline was pumping. But too much early success had taken the edge off. More importantly, Smith was not rattled. He saw where the yards were and took them. As long as he had time, he would move the ball at the proper pace. And that is exactly what he did on the ensuing drive.

Stewart ripped off a 10-yard gain. Hopkins was open again for a 14-yard gain. Stewart, 8-yard run; Hopkins, another 14-yard catch; **Alshon Jeffery**, **Rob Gronkowski**, Hopkins again – bang, bang, bang – the short and medium routes were all clicking as the Cubs’ defenders stayed in their zones, waiting for the mistake that never came. On 3rd & 3 at the Cubs’ 5 yard line, **Ryan Mathews** bowled through the center of the Iowa line for a touchdown to close the gap to 27-21.

“Damn!” Mitch exclaimed. “They keep pulling within 6. The Cubs need to score here then hold them!”

“Well, this is when the Hawks usually fall apart on defence,” I offered reassuringly. “But then you also have to worry about garbage time coming back the other way,” I added as a caution.

With a little less than 8 minutes left in the 4th quarter we were entering prime collapse time for the Brooklin defenders. And, sure enough, when **Tavon Austin** ran around right tackle for an easy 43 yards, across mid-field to the edge of field goal range, it appeared that the expected Brooklin breakdown was well underway. But that’s where it suddenly ended. **Jeremy Hill** was stoned for no gain; Wilson eked out 3 yards on a designed run; and then, on 3rd & 7, **Jerrick McKinnon** was stuffed for a 3-yard loss. With the 4th highest rated quarterback in the league behind center, the Cubs had gone conservative and found themselves facing 4th & 10 at the 39 yards line, just outside of field goal range.

The punt from **Brian Anger** sailed into the end zone for a touchback. The Cubs had netted just 19 yards on the change of possession, but the situation was far from dire. With 3:56 remaining they needed to prevent a touchdown and run out the clock. Having surrendered two touchdowns in two second-half possessions, they were due to make a stop and the fans knew it. Loud chants of ‘*D-FENCE! D-FENCE!*’ reverberated through Joe Ferguson Stadium as white towels twirled feverishly.

The Cubs deployed in their usual 4-3 set and sat in their usual zone, but they moved toward the ball a little quicker. On 3rd & 4 they added a wrinkle; a rare blitz to bring pressure. It seemed to work at first. Then something happened that has happened many times before but always seems to surprise people when it does: Smith took off running toward the very spot recently vacated by the blitzing linebacker. By the time the Cubs finally caught him he had covered 26 yards and entered Iowa territory.

“F*%k!” Mitch barked. “Why did they blitz there? They had them!”

A quick check of *Total 22* will verify that the Cubs did *not* have the play read, however, and moreover the blitz actually thwarted the pass attempt. But the deceptively speedy and deft Smith made an athletic play to get the first down and much more. It was exactly the sort of thing that the Cubs’ Wilson often did to frustrate opposing defences that had zeroed in on the original play call. But having an opponent do it to the Cubs did not sit well with the Iowa partisans at Joe Ferguson Stadium. A scattering of boos could be heard as the crowd paused before resuming the chats of ‘*D-FENCE!*’

The disapproval had a visible effect on the Cubs’ bench. Several of the players turned their heads toward the seats. Others huddled together on the sideline. Redding was attempting to call in a play but nobody seemed to be paying attention. Confusion reigned as the whistle blew on the two-minute warning with the Hawks perched menacingly at the Cubs 41 yard line.

During the break, Redding tried to regain control of his defence. He could be seen talking animatedly with linebacker **Connor Barwin**, who shrugged his shoulders more than once. What they were talking about is still unknown, but the exchange ended as the referees signalled the imminent return to live action.

A short hitch to Hopkins for 8 yards and a first down brought the Hawks into field goal range at the 33. But with time ticking away, a field goal would not do. Smith dropped back to pass and was sandbagged by **Roy Miller III** for a 5-yard loss. The crowd cheered and the Cubs bench danced, but the celebration was short-lived. Hopkins stunned the crowd into silence on the next play by cutting across the zone, snatching a perfectly thrown ball from Smith, and tearing through the secondary for a 38-yard touchdown pass. With 1:09 remaining in the 4th quarter the Hawks were leading for the first time all day, up 28-27.

There was no saving Mitch’s bet now. His shoulders slumped and he took a swig of Amstel. The Cubs could not win by more than a touchdown unless something very strange occurred in the game’s final minute. As it happened, something very strange did occur – but it had nothing to do with salvaging Mitch’s bet.

The stage was set for another **Russell Wilson** miracle comeback. *Ho-hum....*these comebacks were becoming so commonplace they no longer qualified as “miracles.” They had become mildly impressive and notable mainly for adding bulk to the growing legend. Against defensive wreckage like the Hawks a comeback was actually expected. A field goal was all the Cubs needed. With over a minute left and all of their timeouts they had more than enough time to cover the necessary distance.

“The Hawks scored too quickly,” I remarked. Mitch did not reply – he no longer cared.

Starting from their 33, the Cubs started conservatively with a short pass and a couple of runs, tallying 24 yards before they called their first timeout with 0:39 left. They followed that up with an incomplete pass to the running back McKinnon then a handoff to McKinnon on 3rd & 5 that netted just 2 yards to the Hawks’ 41. This forced Wilson to call another timeout with 0:25 left and regroup for a pivotal 4th down play. *Hmmmmmm, cutting it a little close*, I thought to myself. Redding may have thought the same – he looked uncharacteristically pissed off. He glared at Wilson as the quarterback jogged toward the sideline to consult.

He gave him the play and it was a good one: a 12-yard hitch to **Rueben Randle**, who had settled into a gap in the zone, to put the Cubs in field goal range at the 29. They immediately called their last timeout, with 0:18 remaining. The Cubs were in the driver’s seat with a few options: they could attempt a couple of safe sideline passes to get closer for **Jason Myers**; they could call a rollout and a long pass to the back of the end zone; or they could attempt the field goal immediately. One would naturally expect

these options to be discussed during the timeout, but nobody from the offence went over to the sideline. Redding was visibly agitated, barking in the direction of the huddle and pointing at the time clock.

The Cubs' offence caught the officials by surprise when they strolled up to the ball to indicate they were ready with 20 seconds officially still remaining in the timeout. With Redding holding his arms in the air, Wilson threw a short out pass to Randle that missed the mark due to pressure from defensive tackle **Brandon Williams**.

With the incomplete pass Myers stopped kicking into the net and turned to his coach, who was motioning him into the game. But before he could step out onto the field with the rest of the field goal unit, the offence hurried to the line of scrimmage and quickly counted the Hawks' defence. Wilson handed off to Austin, who swept to the outside. He turned the corner and headed toward the sideline. But the Hawks' defensive line and corners had been playing an outside shift. The speedy **Brent Grimes** caught up to the light-framed Austin and wrapped him up, bringing him down in bounds with 2 seconds left. Wilson furiously tried to line up the offence to spike the ball while Redding furiously signalled for a timeout he didn't have.....1 second.....<POW!> the gun sounded and the game was over. The Hawks had upset the Cubs.

The crowd, in complete and utter disbelief, went silent for a few seconds before raining a torrent of boos and bottles onto the field. The normally happy Cubs crowd was angry like never before. The players looked devastated. Redding was tearing his hair out. In the midst of all this the Hawks players and **Tom Jones** celebrated.

"You've got to be f&^king kidding me!" a large gentleman wearing a tight-fitting WILSON jersey bellowed from a corner of the bar. A mixture of claps, cheers, laughter, thumps and loud cursing erupted in Johnny Utah's as patrons, by now all drunk, tried to process the bizarre ending. Something had gone horribly wrong in the game's dying seconds but nobody knew exactly how it had happened. A visibly agitated Redding cut his post-game presser short after taking full responsibility for *"the stuff at the end there"* while a distraught Wilson, on the verge of tears, apologized to *"the people of Iowa."* Austin would not address the media and was last seen running from the stadium wearing a Donald Trump mask.

We may never know what really happened to the Cubs on that day they botched a comeback against the worst 4th quarter defence to enter post-season play in league history. But I have a theory – and it has to do with melting snowflakes.

BACK TO BASICS

Markham coach, **Darrin Jones** was worried about his team losing four of its last five regular season games. He was worried that his quarterback might not have the seasoning to handle the pressure of the playoffs. He was worried that the Aurora cornerbacks and safeties had what it takes to reduce his two elite receivers and playmaking tight end to "normal guys." He was worried that his most talented running back, **David Johnson**, did not have it in him to carry the load to make up for it. He was worried that his defence was no longer capable of generating takeaways at a championship level. He was worried about many things. But most of all, he was worried that somebody in Markham would rig a car bomb to his *Subaru* if it came out that he was moving the North Stars to Budapest in the very near future.

How do I know all this, you ask? Let's just say that I have my sources and they are legion.

Of course, anyone could see that the North Stars were not entering the post-season on a high. After sustaining back-to-back thrashings by the two confirmed powerhouses in the Conference, Sebastian and Aurora, the North Stars had been relegated to the second tier by pundits both local and national. Worse than the pundits disbelieving in the Stars, Jones himself no longer believed in his team. That the "stars" were no longer aligned in his favour was abundantly clear.

But fortunately for Jones, he had been in this space many times before. For years he had suffered at the head of bad and mediocre teams before he and **Eli Manning** had finally and suddenly broken into the Championship ranks in 2012. The one defining characteristic of those early Markham teams was their ability to compete despite severe shortcomings. Jones had instilled in his players the will to fight and had given them the tools to hang in games they had no business being in. Sometimes they outlasted their opponent and scored big upsets. If the awards committee had ever recognized honourable defeat as a valid criterion, Jones would have won Coach of the Year more than once during the time of "The Troubles," as original Markham fans refer to the seasons 2008 through 2011.

As he contemplated his strategy during the bye week, Jones felt that, with a much better team at his disposal in 2016 than he had during "The Troubles," a return to basics against Aurora could very well yield a big victory. And so he went to work on redesigning the game plan in anticipation of being outgunned and outmanned by the peaking Mustangs. It would be a simple game plan built around ball control, short and medium-short passes, inside runs and, the *pièce de résistance*, the "surprise long pass;" unleashed on the unsuspecting Mustangs once they had become completely focused on stopping Markham's small ball tactics. It was a brilliant plan and more likely to succeed than the old version because, unlike the teams of 2008 through 2011, the North Stars of 2016 actually had three excellent receivers to target. He dusted off his old *Tom Landry* playbook and went to work.....

On the other side, deep within the fortified bunker of *Project Adam's* sprawling research complex in Vivian, 10 miles from Aurora, Mustangs' coach, **Rich Liotta** was hunkered down with computer scientists from 'Confederate Oil,' (the energy company belonging to Mustangs' owner, **Haus Beauregard**), analyzing data from 150 Markham North Stars games, both regular season and playoffs. A supercomputer, code-named *Crystal Ball 3001*, made it possible to analyze a multiple overlay of raw statistical data, actual game film, (from all available angles), media interviews, old playbooks and the sequencing of Jones' DNA in order to isolate and predict the overriding tendencies Jones would employ in the upcoming game.

This involved an enormous amount of data that had taken months to collect. Once collected and formatted, however, it took the *Crystal Ball 3001* a mere 48 hours to process the data and produce an abstract. The results were clear. The computer predicted a return to tendencies displayed by the pre-2012 North Stars; in particular those displayed during the 2010 season, at the beginning of what the scientists referred to as the ‘Absorbing Phase’ of pre-Championship Markham. In a nutshell, the ‘Absorbing Phase’ involved channeling the wasted energies of the other team through the perfect execution of a few simple, low yield plays. Over time the repeated execution of these mind-numbing plays produced a sort of hypnotic effect that, at its peak, resulted in on-field day-dreaming by their opponents. When opponents slipped into a daydream that is when apparent miracles happened, like 67-yard TD passes to **Devery Henderson** in the final seconds of a game, giving the impression that the North Stars had “absorbed” the abilities of their opponents. The downside of the ‘Absorbing Phase’ was that it did not work as well on bad teams. This was because the slow pace of the Markham offence gave those teams the impression that they were doing well, producing a feeling of exhilaration and dominance they were not accustomed to feeling.

Rich Liotta knew his team was in trouble. The Mustangs were not a bad team – making them prime targets for an ‘Absorbing’ strategy. If there was one thing **Matt Ryan** could not stand, it was standing on the sideline watching the other team control the ball. It would be endless audibles to **Anquan Boldin** deep down field if he was forced to spend too much time day-dreaming his revenge on the sidelines. And although that long hitch play had produced results in prior years, it had created almost as many problems as it had solved in 2016. No, Liotta would have to prepare his players for his opponents’ revival of an old strategy none of them had ever seen before.

To counter the hypnotic effect of Jones’ steady, incremental attack, also known as the “creeping shrub offence,” Liotta developed a buddy system for players and coaches. This system ensured that nobody on the field or on the bench watched two consecutive Markham plays from snap to whistle. The platoons – offence, defence and special teams – were divided in half. One half was designated ‘Odds’ and the other ‘Evens.’ On odd-numbered plays (i.e., the 1st, 3rd, 5th plays, etc of a given Markham possession) the ‘odd’ players would watch and engage the play in the normal way, while the ‘even’ players averted their eyes and listened to the odd-numbered defensive captain call out signals describing the pre-snap positions and movement of the Markham players. Once the ball was snapped the ‘even’ players would lift their eyes in the direction of the play, as called out by the captain, and, while loudly singing or bellowing whatever came to mind (usually something like ‘Lalalalalala’), engage their man or man their zone. The singing/yelling was important to keep their brains and breathing active; both were powerful defences against an externally-induced trance state. On even-numbered plays the roles were reversed. This kept all of the players, whether on or off the field, mentally active and focused on the task. It would potentially have the added bonus of freaking out the Markham players.

Liotta realized, however, that his system might still break down. Players might lose track of what play it was, or Jones could always dial up the trance power by running a combination of **Tim Hightower**, **Andre Ellington** and **Christine Michael** inside,



No, this is not a picture from late in the 4th quarter of a blowout. This photo was taken mid-way through the 3rd quarter with the home town Mustangs up by 7 points, 17-10, and the North Stars driving ever so slowly into Mustangs’ territory.

or off tackle, three consecutive plays or more. If that happened there might be no preventing the players' eyes from glazing over or their minds from wandering.

To account for this possibility, Liotta arranged for the team Gatorade to be replaced by the well-known 'Blue Bull' energy drink. He also equipped his trainers with cattle prods, to zap players who had nodded off. He positioned speakers around the benches and instructed one of the assistant coaches to play Slayer's '*Repentless*' during commercial breaks. And, if all this wasn't enough to keep his players awake, he would call on **Misty**, the most beautiful of the *Northern Dancers* cheerleaders and an ex-stripper, to do a solo with a pre-arranged "wardrobe malfunction" at the Aurora bench. This would be a one-shot deal and was only to be used in an emergency.

I arrived at Johnny Utah's just before noon on Sunday with a splitting headache from the night before. I wanted to make sure that I could concentrate on the Markham-Aurora game, which was first on the schedule for Sunday, so I ordered a pitcher of *Rolling Rock* to take the edge off. By the time the game started I was well into my 2 lbs of suicide chicken wings and sipping on a bottle of *Dogfish IPA*, a great hoppy beer that was on special because they had sold just 3 bottles in two weeks. A beer nerd on staff had ordered it because it had appeared on a list of great American craft brews. The bar was trying to attract the higher end clientele from the Rockefeller Center by putting reputable micro brews on the menu. It was a hit-and-miss practice and apparently *Dogfish* had been a miss. *Oh well, my gain*, I thought to myself.

Despite my best efforts to focus, I don't remember much about the game from watching it live. I had to consult my home recording and the internet to fill in the many blanks in my memory. The Markham game plan had had the desired effect on just about everybody but the Mustangs. But even they had not been totally immune. For example, I remember the North Stars opening the scoring in the 1st quarter with a well-executed 14-yard hitch from **Tyrod Talor** to **Stefon Diggs**. I remember thinking that Diggs was a good-looking receiver and wondered where he had been all season before I remembered, of course, that he was behind **Brandon Marshall** and **Demaryius Thomas** on the depth chart. But do you think I could remember *how* the Stars got to the 14 yard line? Do you think anyone else at the bar with me could either? No way!

When I went back later to my video recording I managed to isolate the sequence that had obliterated my recollection of the drive. It was a mind-numbing four-play set that went like this: trap-left by Hightower for no gain; off tackle-left by Ellington for 7 yards; off tackle-right by Hightower for 5 yards; trap-left by Michael for 2 yards. It wasn't merely that they were four run plays in a row (the Cubs had called a couple of four-run sequences that hadn't messed with my head) it was something about the strict and ponderously slow rhythm in which they were executed that provoked a spike in melatonin production across the continent. I also noted that Misty had made an appearance at the Aurora bench immediately after the **Christine Michael** carry. A TV camera captured a shot of her covered in a blanket and being escorted from the field. Misty had been too late to prevent the opening TD.

My memory of the game basically consists of scenes, largely out of context. I remember being surprised when I saw that the final score was Aurora 23, Markham 20. The game had not felt that close. But do you think I could remember *why* I felt that way? Or who had scored the first Aurora touchdown? The only crystal clear memory I have of the Mustangs appearing to be in control was after **Mason Crosby** kicked a booming 56-yard field goal to put the Mustangs up 20-13 early in the 4th quarter. The cute girl next to me (named Amy, I would later discover), wearing a white RYAN jersey, threw her hands up in glee and her elbow knocked my *Cascade Apricot Ale* out of my hand. *Looks like the Mustangs are in control*, I remember thinking before turning to an apologetic Amy and the devil in me wondering: *How am I going to turn this little accident to my advantage?*

I have clear memories of **Kenyan Drake**. The dynamic rookie running back of the Mustangs brought the flat screen alive nearly every time he touched the ball. He finished with 124 yards on 12 carries, failing to find the end zone but playing a vital role in setting up the second Aurora TD and the last two Crosby field goals. 10 more carries by Drake would have blasted Markham's "Absorbing" strategy out of the water.

Now, in case you are reading this thinking that my memory of the game was unduly affected by excessive beer consumption (there is no such thing by the way), check out the national media coverage. Accounts of the game on the news wires and internet are all fragmentary. In his game report, Markham's own **Lanny McDonald** described meeting **Mike Kitchen** at the game and reminiscing about their days with the Colorado Rockies, the original Colorado NHL franchise. Lanny wrote just one line about the game: *"I hoped for more from our Stars but they looked a lot like we did on the Rockies back in the day and lost 23-20."*

One of the more detailed and reliable outlines of the game came from **Darrin Jones** himself. He posted it on his *Mugshot* page after the game. I got his permission to reprint it for those of you who are interested. I have posted it at the end of my column. Interestingly and tellingly, it does not include a single reference to his *real* strategy of trying to lull the Mustangs into a coma; nor even a passing comment on the *real* defensive strategy of his Mustang opponents, although he *must* have noticed **NaVorro Bowman** bellowing '*BOOGALALALALA!*' while closing to stuff Hightower for a loss near the Markham bench. I followed up in my e-mail exchange with Jones with a request for comment on the revival of his old "Absorbing" tactics but he has yet to respond.

AROUND THE EFL

The bookend games this weekend did not reveal anything we didn't already know about the teams involved. The first game on the weekend playoff slate featured wildcard winner Gwinnett against North Division winner and Atlantic no.1 seed Sebastian at the Fish Tank. It had been promoted on the network as a battle of 'Old vs Young' – with **Ben Roethlisberger**, **LeSean McCoy** and **Joe Thomas** starring for Team Old; and **Odell Beckham Jr**, **Jameis Winston** and **Carlos Dunlap** headlining for Team Young. The fact that **Andy Dalton** had been the announced starter at QB for more than a week did not stop this promotional segment from running

up until game day. I sometimes wonder who comes up with these stupid marketing angles. There are no credits attached and that's probably a good thing for the people involved in creating them.

As expected, Team Young ran circles around good old Ben and his Merry Men (Glads, get it?) in a 35-18 ritual slaughter that was dominated by the Swordfish to a greater extent than the final score would indicate. This was the first playoff game in Swordfish history and one that most people expected them to win rather easily. This naturally created pressure on **Russ Lemmon** and his young charges that they were unaccustomed to experiencing and it appeared to manifest in a case of early nerves. The opening exchange went in favour of Gwinnett, with **Adam Vinatieri** missing a field goal and **Big Ben** spotting **Jarvis Landry** in the end zone for the game's first score. That would be the last time the Glads looked to be in control of anything.

After getting their fins wet, the Swordfish went on to dominate everything from the time of possession, to the score, to the amount of air time devoted by colour commentator, **Phil Mimms** to singing the praises of Dalton and his pair of talented young receivers. Dalton, Beckham and **Doug Baldwin** put on a clinic, combining for 250 yards and 3 touchdowns. Impressive numbers, but still less than half of the total yardage output for Sebastian on this day.

The lop-sidedness did not make it a riveting game to watch. However it did feature the 'Insane Play of the Weekend.' This was another crazy 4th down conversion attempt by the Swordfish – a 4th & 2 from their 28 yard line in the middle of the 3rd quarter in a 25-15 game. It was a real 'Fire-or-Hire' – the type of call that can get a coach fired if it fails or an extended contract if it succeeds. **Justin Forsett** ran 9 yards off right tackle to convert and Sebastian went on to eventually kick a field goal. The success made it a "brilliant move," "a gutsy call," a "bold strike," among other superlatives. I wonder what they would have called it if it had failed and the Gladiators had gotten back in the game as a result....

The weekend football frenzy finished with a late Sunday afternoon context at Wilhalla Stadium between the Triumph and the LA Knights. We know from experience that as a team approaches the highly-coveted and extremely rare Perfect Season, tension builds in proportion to the proximity to that ultimate achievement. It was because of this that a significant minority saw an upset in the making. This was based almost solely on the fact that the Knights had forced 5 turnovers in the only regular season match-up between the teams, a difficult 21-14 win for the Triumph. The LA offence had made a dismal showing in that game or else talk of a perfect season in Twin Cities would have ended in unlucky Week 13.

The LA offence performed much better this time, but the defence failed to force a single takeaway. The 'Blue Shield' managed, however, to limit the scorching hot **Antonio Brown** to a single catch in only 6 targets. Knowing this fact alone would lead those who believed that Brown was the sole source of the Triumph offence to extrapolate that the Knights had pulled off an amazing upset. But that was far from the case. The Triumph proved what **Guy Williams** had once said to be true: that there were other weapons on his offence to turn to. Seldom spoken-of **Rishard Matthews** proved his worth with 127 yards receiving and a TD on 4 catches while **Doug Martin** provided a reliable force on the ground with 86 yards and 1 TD against a good run defence. Brown did have his say, however. He returned a punt 74 yards for a TD for the Triumph's third major score.

The psychological turning point came late in the 1st quarter. Whether he wished to one-up Russ Lemmon's gambit the day before, or simply calculated that the odds of a touchback were greater and the chances of a field goal slimmer than the probability that a pass could net them 15 yards or more, Williams had his offence go for it on 4th & 20 from the Knights' 34. **Carson Palmer** targeted **Shane Vereen** deep, an unusual route for the running back. He was covered by linebacker **Sean Lee**, who was not expecting a deep route and grabbed at Vereen while the ball was in the air. The resulting pass interference penalty netted the Triumph 17 yards and an automatic first down. They would go on to score a TD. For those who hadn't thought it through, it looked like an irreverent challenge to the Knights' defence, an affront to its great pride. Whatever it really was, it set the tone. The Triumph were the Boss in their own house. The Knights moved the ball a lot and controlled the time of possession. But the final, 31-20 for the Triumph, with a late LA TD thrown in, was not even close.

ANATOMY OF A PLAYOFF GAME

By Darrin Jones

EFL Playoff Action: Markham @ Aurora

It was a good ball game, not the most exciting game ever, but a game played close to the vest (it was a 1 score game for the first 56 minutes of the game) with both teams trying to execute their game plans as follows:

Offensively : Markham had to recognize that the big 3 receivers were not going to carry the day , focused on getting others the ball and tried to control the clock , Aurora , while not using the traditional long ball , planned to be aggressive with their pass- run ratio - saving the dynamic Kenyan Drake for the 2nd half.

Defensively: Markham needed to create havoc for Matt Ryan , while hoping their run stopping defense would raise to the occasion to limit big chunk of yards.

Aurora - for the most part keep a mindful eye on Tyrod Taylor and looked to limit big plays - so their opportunistic defense could generate turnovers.

How the game turned out:

Offensively: Indeed Markham was able to control time of possession and used the running back by committee successfully , however still more had to be expected from Marshall and Thomas duo - and they were held well in check by the Mustang stud CBs .. Taylor was effective enough through the first 3Q , but he could not will the team to a required 7 points when Markham needed it most and when we had the wind at our sails. Aurora had the chance for more 1st half points , but had 2 critical misfires (INT , FG miss) - however a 4th and goal TD and huge punt return late in 2nd quarter - gave the Mustangs a tie at half time ... it was not until Drake got his workload in the 2H - did Aurora pin Markham on its heels and he had a huge hand in setting up all 13 2nd half points for Aurora. In fact Aurora did not punt until under 2min in the game - when they were up 2 scores.

Defensively: Markham while playing a bend but don't break style to keep themselves in the game, did not generate the havoc on Ryan needed,

only 1 sack , no other hurries and 1 INT , our run stuffing defenders did not perform to their regular season form ,even as the Markham coaching staff did not invest in calling many run defense schemes , any blitzes from Markham were easily picked up by the blocking RB/TE of Aurora. Aurora while giving up more yards than normal and were on their heels early , were patient and were in the right positions for the remainder of the , as they dictated the play, came up with a turnover at the most crucial part of the 4Q and ultimately kept Markham at bay , while their offense rolled

Other factors - penalties were not a factor , special teams did have a role , as both teams had some FG adventures and a huge 2Q punt return gave Aurora and a 56 yard FG bu Aurora placekicker mason Crosby paid huge dividends in the end - as for challenges - they gave both coaches very anxious moments given the plays reviewed up in the booth - but in the end it really evened out from a game impact perspective . The bye week seemed to give players extra rest as there was very little player fatigue and the only injury of note was Markham tailback Andre Ellington being forced to leave the game in the 2Q while executing unaccustomed blocking assignment.

Summary - while it was a close game, the better team won and earned victory. For Markham we needed to create another defensive break - but all season in big games - the team did not have that big 4Q defensive play or stop in them , as for Aurora - they move on and are playing at a very high and consistent level right now on both sides of the ball recognizing the things they need to do to win a ballgame

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PACIFIC CONFERENCE

BROOKLIN @ TWIN CITIES (line – TRIUMPH by 10)

INJURIES: Brooklin – Zach Hocker (OUT), Charles Johnson (OUT), Antrel Rolle (OUT); Twin Cities – Oday Aboushi (OUT).

Now that they are here in the post-season the Hawks suddenly look a lot more dangerous. Just ask the Cubs. Their offence, one of the league's most proficient, is still going strong, with Alex Smith looking a little more steely than usual and DeAndre Hopkins running rampant through coverage. Meanwhile their amazing disappearing defence – the one that used to vanish without a trace in 4th quarters throughout the regular season – somehow managed to dispel the legendary 4th quarter magic of Russell Wilson last week on the game's final drive to preserve the win. That the Cubs may have accidentally stopped themselves on that drive is a moot point at this stage, but one that needs to be in the back of one's mind when assessing this fat double-digit spread. If the Hawks' defence is experiencing an extraordinary and unanticipated playoff rebirth then all bets are off so to speak. But if they simply got lucky last week, or Wilson's luck ran out, then it is back to considering the real possibility of a hometown blowout. The so-far perfect Triumph are not in this position by accident. They have scored more points than any other team, using basically three players to do it: Antonio Brown, Doug Martin and Carson Palmer. Those guys deserve a medal for getting it done without much help from their offensive line and a thin supporting cast of skill players; those three are great. But while the media marvel at the likes of Brown, Palmer and Martin the role of the Triumph defence in the team's extraordinary success often gets overlooked. Few expected that Twin Cities would have the top-ranked defence in the league in terms of per-play efficiency; or have the highest number of sacks in the league, given their lack of a true edge-rusher at linebacker. But take a look and you will see they are near the top in all of the defensive categories that matter most. This puts enormous pressure on opponents to not make a mistake. For all that proven defensive prowess, however, expect the Hawks' offence to mount a real challenge.. In addition to a mostly error-free quarterback and the stud wide receiver already mentioned, they have 'The Gronk,' Jonathan Stewart and a very good offensive line, one capable of competing with the deep, but not exactly star-studded, Twin Cities defensive line. If the Hawks can keep up the pressure on the scoreboard, it is not out of the question that Palmer could make more than one mistake in an attempt to keep up. This would be the key to a Brooklin upset – breaking the cycle of a lively scoring exchange with a big turnover or, better yet, a defensive score. It remains a bit of a long shot. Meanwhile, there are many paths to a Twin Cities win. The Triumph have not just been very good, they have had things go their way. It sometimes feels like we are all watching destiny unfold in a way uncannily similar to the Mustangs' 'Golden Season' in 2014. It is likely that the perfect Triumph run will continue for at least one more week, and equally likely that Hawks will make that feat a little more difficult than the Triumph Faithful would like. **PICK: BROOKLIN**

ATLANTIC CONFERENCE QUARTER FINALS

AURORA @ SEBASTIAN (line – MUSTANGS by 3)

INJURIES: Aurora – None; Sebastian – None.

These teams did not face each other during the regular season, increasing speculation and debate about which team is better and really deserves the no.1 seed. There is no question, however, that these are the two best teams in the Atlantic Conference and, after Sunday, the dispute about which team is the best will be, barring some official controversy, put to rest for now. In view of that, the Swordfish being 3-point underdogs at home is sure bulletin board material in the Sebastian locker room. It is sometimes hard to divine the thinking of the Vegas Illuminati who concoct these spreads for the industry, but in this case it likely boils down to reputation and experience weighing heavily in favour of the visitors. The Swordfish boast the most powerful offence in the league, the second highest margin of victory and a top 5 defence. But they are still the new kids on the block. They are also acquiring a reputation as risk takers. The downside to risk, of course, is that its negative repercussions increase against better competition; and the Mustangs qualify as such competition, elevating the risk associated with betting on the Fish. The offence under Russ Lemmon has recently developed ultra-aggressive tendencies reflected in play selection, 4th down attempts and surprise onside kick attempts. On the other hand, the defence tends to play it safe, blitzing only 6% of the time and relying on three technique linemen Chandler Jones and Carlos Dunlap to generate pressure. With 48 sacks overall (just 4 of those from linebackers), this strategy seems to be working well. But from a tactical perspective, caging dogs like Jeremy Attaochu and Jadeveon Clowney gives a good quarterback with a good offensive line one less thing to worry about during his pre-snap reads. With each new win in their 14-game streak the Mustangs are looking more and more like the Mustangs we have watched dominate the league for the past three seasons. However, a tendency for Matt Ryan and his receivers to take occasional cat naps on the field creates vulnerabilities that a good defence could expose with a sound game plan. The Ryan-led air assault can still sting, but one wonders where it would be without the unexpected but very real threat of rookie Kenyan Drake in the backfield. The thing that will have to perform in order to propel the Mustangs to their third straight Final is, of course, their defence. Last week the stifling duo of Patrick Peterson and Josh Norman held Markham's two elite wide receivers at bay and limited them to a combined 37 yards! Peterson and Norman have another tough assignment this week against an arguably better pair of wide-outs in Odell Beckham Jr and Doug Baldwin, who benefit from having a better quarterback throwing to them and a genuine game-changer in the backfield in CJ Anderson to respect. Despite the bulletproof appearance of the Mustangs secondary, it is safe to say that shots from the Red Rifle will occasionally get through and make a mark on the scoreboard. JJ Watt, a steady if somewhat subdued force this year, will need to have one of his best performance in order to keep the Swordfish offence from taking control. Despite these teams being almost too close to call, I don't expect a close game. The Swordfish have boom or bust written all over them as they prepare to attack the most talented defence in the league. It will either work or it won't. Expect them to go on the attack immediately and either pile up an early lead, or flame out in an eruption of turnovers and short fields for their opponent. I expect the new kid to put on a daring, crazy show and actually get away with it. **PICK: SEBASTIAN**



ANCIENT HISTORY CHANNEL PRESENTS

This Week in EFL History
With Professor Sterling Smitherman

FROM THE EFL ARCHIVES – The Quarter Finals of the 2010 EFL season were the most lop-sided on record. None of the wildcard teams, all four of them, were able to stand up to the Division winners. Only one cracked double digits on the scoreboard – LA managed 20 points in a 38-20 loss to the Patriots, scoring 2 TDs in the 4th quarter after with the game was well out of reach. The Pats offence didn't have much to do; being called on to finish off drives started by turnovers, 4 of them, forced by their defence.

The only wildcard team thought to have a chance at

pulling off an upset, Durham, was KO'd by Favre-Johnson one-two punch in the third quarter. **Brett Favre** connected with **Vincent Jackson** for an 18-yard TD pass and **Chris Johnson** drove all 53 yards after an **Asante Samuel** interception of Philip Rivers to punch it home from 1 yard to give Pickering a 24-7 lead that was never threatened in a 30-7 win.

In Chino, the 'Lockdown Crew' lived up to its name, holding the Kutztown Golden Bears to just 10 first downs and a single touchdown in a 24-7 beat down. Donovan McNabb threw 2 TD passes in the win – a game that was marred by a delay caused by fans throwing debris, including a rotting bear paw, at the Kutztown bench.

In saving the "best" for last, the Dragons torched the Crimson Hawks 42-0 in the worst blowout in playoff history. Lost in time to the spectacle of such a lop-sided score was the fact that the Dragons only led 7-0 deep into the 3rd quarter. It was, in fact, the "closest" contest of the weekend. Florida scored 35 points in an 11-minute span beginning late in the 3rd and ending mid-way through the 4th quarter. A 91-yard TD run by **Ray Rice**, a 63-yard TD run by **Jonathan Stewart**, and a 32-yard pick-six by **Leigh Bodden** fueled the raging flames.