



Sports

by Jerry Keys

As we all look forward to the holiday season, the NFL playoffs tend to start catching our attention from Turkey day to Christmas Day. The 2008 season appears to be an incredible mess, where teams with a 9-7 record will have a great shot at playing in January.

There are several early locks for the playoffs after ten weeks. In the AFC there is only one, the Tennessee Titans, who are entertaining thoughts of a perfect season (10-0 heading into Nov. 23), while the other three divisions are no "locks" for the current leaders.

The New York Jets (7-3) and Pittsburgh Steelers (7-3) have the inside track for the East and North with a game lead over their nearest competitors. To date, the Jets have won their only meeting with the Miami Dolphins (6-4) and host the final game at NYJ and split two games with the New England Patriots (6-4). And the Steelers won the first game against Baltimore (6-4) but the Ravens host the other game later this year.

The San Diego Chargers were expected to run away with the West but have seen their wheels come off throughout the year. The Denver Broncos (6-4) currently hold a two-game lead over the Chargers (4-6) but the West is still up for grabs. San Diego hosts Denver in the final game of the year and it may decide the division.

Although the Titans have all but locked up the South, the Indianapolis Colts (6-4) and Jacksonville Jaguars (4-6) still hold hope of a playoff spot. The Jaguars were my pre-season pick to win the Super Bowl and

what is worse, I picked Seattle to represent the NFC and the Seahawks are currently 2-8. At least I did not pick the Detroit Lions and Oakland Raiders.

The AFC division winners should be #1-Titans, #2-Jets, #3-Steelers, #4-Chargers. The final two spots will be a dogfight between five teams: Dolphins, Patriots, Ravens,

1). The South leader, the Carolina Panthers (8-2), are almost guaranteed at least a wild card berth with the Tampa Bay Buccaneers (7-3), Atlanta Falcons (6-4), and New Orleans Saints (5-5) fighting for a wild-card berth.

The NFC division winners should be #1-Giants, #2-Cardinals, #3-Panthers, #4-Packers. Six teams (three from the East, three from the South) will vie for the final two spots. My pick

NFL Playoff Preview

vision.

On a final note, I would wish to make a comment on baseball's Hall of Fame selections. What is it with the new "sabermetrics"? What happened to just looking at the hitter's average, home run totals, RBI total or total hits?

Or a pitcher's ERA, strikeouts, or wins? Someone please explain to me why a hitter's on base percentage while batting with runners in scoring position during day games when the temperature is over 92 degrees has as much bearing as lifetime totals. I can understand a pitcher's ERA compared to the league average for that year but declaring a pitcher with a .500 record who has a better strikeout to walk ratio and strikeouts per inning ratio a better pitcher than a solid Hall'er such as Phil Niekro is absurd.

The old qualifications for enshrinement were either 3,000 hits or 400 home runs (I guess that is now raised to 500 over the past fifteen years) or 300 wins or 3,000 strikeouts. If that is (was) the case, I would like to make note of several players who would have or

could have reached these milestones if it were not for the extended strikes in 1981 and 1994.

Harold Baines completed his career with 2866 hits

Harold Baines 384, Graig Nettles 390, Dwight Evans 385, Dale Murphy 398, Joe Carter 396, and Andres Galarraga 399. Fred McGriff would have surely



Kerry Collins seeks return trip to the Super Bowl

Colts, and Jaguars. All five teams could easily finish at 9-7. If I were asked who the two teams would be, my picks would be the Colts at #5 and Ravens #6.

In the NFC there are two locks, the defending Super Bowl champion New York Giants (9-1) and Arizona Cardinals (7-3). Earlier in the year everyone thought the two wild cards were to come from the NFC East but the South may have a wild card entry as well.

The West will be represented by the Cardinals, who at 7-3 hold a four-game lead and the North who have a three way tie for first place at 5-5 (Green Bay Packers, Chicago Bears, and Minnesota Vikings).

The other three teams in the East are still in the playoff race with the Washington Redskins (6-4), Dallas Cowboys (6-4), and Philadelphia Eagles (5-4-

would be #5-Redskins and #6-Buccaneers.

A major injury could turn the tide for any team. The Cowboys were thought to post a 12-win season until their QB went down. Any one of the five AFC teams and six NFC teams who are expected to compete for a wild-card berth could easily either land a #5 or #6 spot or be sitting at home in January.

If Peyton Manning went out for the year as Tom Brady did, would the Colts still have a legitimate shot at a wild-card berth? The NFC wild-card entries could come down to head-to-head matchups against teams in their di-



Kurt Warner.....Cinderella Season II?

and Andre Dawson 2774. Each player lost time due to the '81 and '94 strike. Maybe if each had those extra games they would have eclipsed the hallowed 3,000 hit mark or played an extra season to reach it.

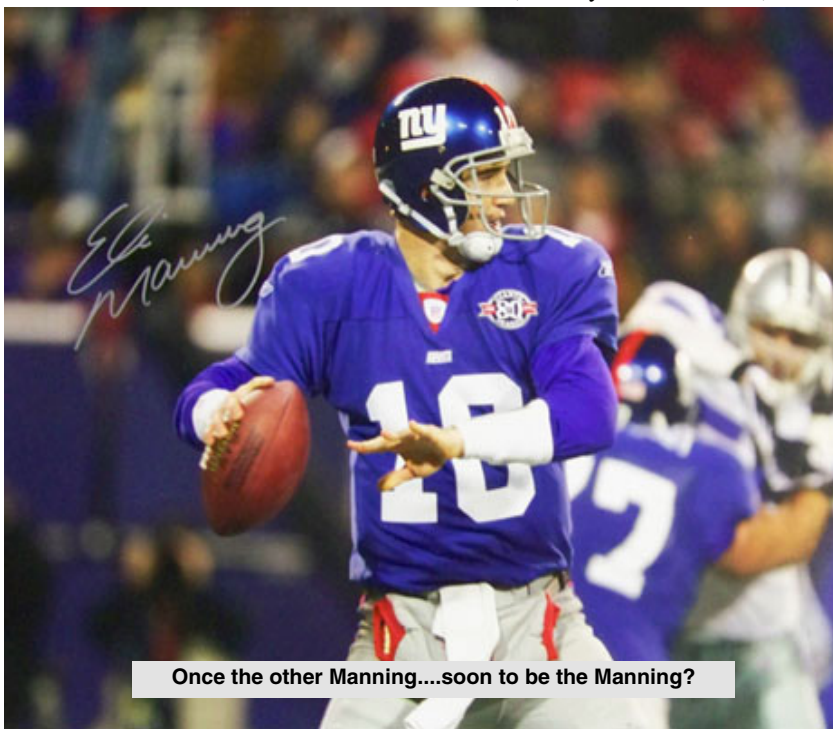
These following players could have passed the 400 home run mark if it were not for strike(s): Matt Williams 378, Jim Rice 382, Larry Walker 383,

passed 500 if not for the '94 strike (retired with 493). How many home runs did the '94 strike cost Ken Griffey?

As for pitchers, how close to 300-wins would Tommy John (288) or Bert Blyleven (287) have gotten had the '81 strike not took place? Would it have made a difference if Blyleven passed 5,000 IP if there was no '81 strike (he finished with 4970 IP)?

If Greg Maddux does retire how many more wins could he have achieved if it were not for the '94 strike? Would he have tried to notch enough to get to win #374? He was only 19 wins away (see article March 2007), now considering retirement with 355 wins.

Maybe current players who have aspirations of making the Hall will think of these things before they call another strike when they make millions per year while the fans are losing their homes and families.



Once the other Manning....soon to be the Manning?