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MONDAY, JANUARY 6, 2014

NEW YEAR'S EVE IS FOR SUCKERS: PREVIEW OF THE SEATTLE SEAHAWKS VS. NEW ORLEANS SAINTS PLAYOFF GAME

Happy New Year everyone!



Perhaps when you think New Year's, you think about having crazy random run-ins with a 100 different random actors that ultimately deliver a completely derivative story where some thoughtful music rolls out at the end while a random couple happily find each other since they were fated to be together. Well, I got news for you, that's just the plot of the terrible 2011 movie, "New Year's Eve". And trust me, if you've never heard of the film before, that's a good thing. It got 7% total on Rotten Tomatoes and was nominated for 5 Razzies (which are like the anti-Oscars basically recognizing the worst movies of the year). Heck, I think my last family vacation video from when I was 12 got 8% on Rotten Tomatoes, so you can imagine how bad 7% is.



New Year's means basically two things to me. First, my gym is going to be crowded for about three weeks as everyone tries to make good on their New Year's resolutions to lose 1000 pounds this year before giving up and going back to eating extra value meals at McDonald's for lunch (which, by the way, are indeed a real value on a calories to dollars ratio). Second, it means that the NFL playoffs have started and, since the Bears aren't in it, it's time to pay attention to the NBA. Unless, of course, you're

MOST DISCUSSED

The Packers are improving, but they can't win the Super Bowl. Week 17 Power Rankings.

Geno Smith outperformed everyone's expectations

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How good is Seattle right now? Are they the best team in the NFL? Week 17 Power Rankings



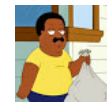
Isn't That Kangeroo Cute?: Early Week 1 Fantasy Football

Pickups



Off-season

Troubleshooting: St. Louis Rams



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The Ravens stole one against New England last week. Here's a look at week 4 matchups.



F5 Tomadoes Are For Wimps: Is Tom Brady



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3-2As the National anthem was sung players, fans, and staff alike let it be known

their here to see our boys leave the pitch w...

Yahoo Fantasy Football Rankings
 Tavon Austin can prove out to be a steal for the St.Louis Rams - Tavon Austin can prove out to be a steal for the St.Louis Rams There is no doubt that the St.Louis Rams have lacked of a solid option at the wide receive...

B4



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a Bulls fan, in which case Derrick Rose going down for a second season means it's time to pay attention to the NHL. Sigh.



But just because my team isn't in the playoffs, doesn't mean there aren't interesting games going on. And one of the more interesting ones has got to be the New Orleans Saints going to the Seattle Seahawks.

The Seattle Seahawks



Strengths

Clearly, the primary strength of the Seattle Seahawks is their defense. The Seahawks are number 1 in total defense allowing the least amount of yards of any defense in the NFL (4378 yards -- Carolina is second with a distant 4820 yards allowed). They also allow the least passing yards per game (172.0) and the least amount of points per game (14.4), but are "only" tied for 7th for rushing yards allowed (101.6).

Interestingly, no single Seahawk is in the top 20 for tackles. Bobby Wagner is the first Seahawk on the list at 21st with 120 combined tackles (including assists). And no single Seahawk is in the top 20 for total sacks. Interceptions, though, are another story. The Seahawks have three players in the top 20 with Richard Sherman leading the way with 8, Earl Thomas tied for 5th with 5 and Byron Maxwell tied for 11th with 4. But the fact that Seattle's individual defensive players aren't lighting up all the individual categories is probably why Seattle does so well. They work as a team to accomplish what they do and they don't rely on any single player to do it (though Sherman has been as much an impact player on defense as anyone in the NFL).

As far as offense is concerned, one word sums it up -- "Beastmode". Or is that two words? Who knows, all I know is that if you're nickname is "Beastmode" you basically have to play football, or star in the awful 1980's Marc Singer and Tanya Roberts (thankfully better known for her part in the original Charlie's Angels TV series) vehicle "Beastmaster". And let's face it, starring in a movie with Marc Singer basically means you've made some poor life decisions. But I digress. Seattle is 4th in the NFL with 136.8 rush yards per game, due in large part to "Beastmode" himself, Marshawn Lynch (and as a side note, what a steal it was for Seattle to pick him off the scrap heap after being discarded by Buffalo). It's safe to say that Seattle can run the ball.

Weaknesses

It's not necessarily a weakness, but the Seahawks are not a team that lives in the air. They're a measly 202.3 passing yards per game, good for 7th worst in the NFL. But that's OK, because Seattle is a ball control team (even though they only have an average time of possession of 29:53, right in the middle of all NFL teams tied for 19th). They keep

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offenses neutralized with their defense and then control the clock with a great run game and a very conservative passing attack (Seattle tied for the second least interceptions during the regular season with only 9), basically going to the air only when necessary and to keep secondaries honest. Seattle's conservative offense has outpaced its opponents on total first downs during the regular season with 307 compared to only 282.

New Orleans Saints



Strengths

It's no surprise that the New Orleans Saints have the 2nd most passing yards (4918) and the 2nd most passing TDs (39) in the NFL being helmed by the undersized but ultra accurate Drew Brees (68.5% completion percentage, good for 2nd in the NFL – starting to see a trend here?). Clearly with options like Jimmy Graham, Marques Colston, Kenny Stills and Darren Sproles, Brees can really spread it around. And believe it or not, Rob Ryan has quietly turned the Saints Defense into the 4th best in the NFL allowing only 4891 total yards (that's 305.7 per game with 194.1 passing yards per game and 111.6 rushing yards per game). Clearly, the Saints are better against the pass than they are against the run, but all in all, not a bad change for a team that had the worst defense in the NFL just last year.

Weaknesses

Aside from being mediocre on defense against the run, the Saints are also weak on offense with the run. The Saints are the 8th worst in the NFL in rushing with only 92.1 rushing yards per game. Now that's not entirely fair since one of their running backs, Darren Sproles, is not your typical back. Swing passes and screens to Sproles are practically a direct extension of the Saints ground game, even though its not counted towards rushing stats. Although the Saints' leading rusher, Pierre Thomas, is now out, Mark Ingram has been trending up for several games, running effectively when required. And Khiry Robinson has also been effective as a change of pace. Most importantly, the Saints ground game doesn't turn over the ball with only 1 fumble lost through the entire regular season. So they're not going to be focal point, but they do what needs to be done and are enough of a threat to keep play action available.

Comparison

The Seahawks will win this game if they keep doing what they do best, shut down the pass. As long as Seattle's dangerous secondary keep Brees in check, it will be difficult for New Orleans to move the ball. And since the Saints are only mediocre against the run, Marshawn Lynch should have a field day slowly moving the ball down the field on some very long sustained drives, giving the Seattle Defense plenty of time to rest up and run with Brees' weapons. And, of course, New Orleans had its worst defeat this season on December 2 to the Seahawks in Seattle by a score of 34-7. Seattle knows how to play the Saints.

The Saints win this game if they can establish a ground game with Ingram, Sproles and Robinson. It sounds strange, but we saw what can happen to Brees if his receiving options get bottled up. The Eagles played Graham and Colston tight with double coverage, and it almost worked. Mark Ingram had to put together a career day with 97 yards and a TD to keep them alive, and ultimately it came down to a last second field goal to

win the game against the worst passing defense in the NFL. In the loss earlier this season to the Seahawks, the Seahawks Defense held the Saints to just 44 yards rushing. Clearly, the Saints will need to do better than that on the ground to win.

Prediction

Seattle beats New Orleans 27 – 20. Either that, or Golden Tate gets injured, so Josh Duhamel comes in for one play and catches the game winning TD, accidentally running into Sarah Jessica Parker on the sideline while she's randomly walking by after getting bad directions to the fish market in Seattle, and they hit it off and go on a date. Oh wait, that's just that stupid film again. My bad.



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