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SEASON REACHES MIDPOINT; IT'S ALL UPHILL FROM HERE!

Halfway there, almost nothing is clear.

Sure, one club is spotless, the Tennessee Titans at 7-0 with a four-game lead in the AFC South. Right behind them are the 6-1 New York Giants – but with only a half-game lead in the NFC East. Two divisions – the AFC East and NFC North – are tied at the top. And one game separates the top two clubs in two other divisions – the AFC North and NFC South.

As the NFL reaches the midpoint of its season this week, much is bubbling. Houston has won three in a row. Cleveland has won three of its last four, as have the New York Jets. Carolina at 6-2 is one game within matching its victory total of last year. Miami (3-4) has tripled its win total of last season.

“Now is the push where teams begin to define themselves halfway through the season,” says head coach **JIM ZORN** of the Washington Redskins, who are a half game behind the Giants.

As the weather turns colder, the “pushing” will only get rougher. “There’s going to be, I’m sure, a lot of tight games down the road,” says New England Patriots quarterback **MATT CASSEL**.

Like this week. Some of the Week 9 NFL games that will contain, for sure, “tricks and treats” on Halloween Weekend:

DALLAS COWBOYS (5-3) at NEW YORK GIANTS (6-1)

STORYLINE: What better way to welcome November than Giants-’Boys in the brisk outdoors!

And although these two have had many memorable games in their series dating back to 1960, they will have to go a long way this season to top last year’s three meetings. On Kickoff ’07 Weekend in Dallas, the Giants and Cowboys combined for the most points in any game in series history (80) with a 45-35 Dallas win. Two months later, Cowboys **QB TONY ROMO** threw four TD passes, snapping the Giants’ six-game winning streak (31-20).

The capper came two months after that, when, in the first playoff game ever between the clubs, the Giants knocked the 13-3 Cowboys out of the postseason with a Divisional Playoff win (21-17) en route to the Super Bowl XLII championship.

Hard feelings? Well this *is* Giants-Cowboys.

With their 13-9 win last Sunday over Tampa Bay (the fewest points they’ve given up this year), the Cowboys are a game-and-a-half behind the Giants in the NFC East (the division with the highest winning percentage entering Week 9, .700).

One of the keys to the game will be the speed with which probable starting Cowboys **QB BRAD JOHNSON** gets rid of the ball, because the Giants will be coming! New York is fresh off a five-sack win over Pittsburgh that included four interceptions. Expect good old November pounding also by **RBs BRANDON JACOBS** (Giants, No. 1 NFL rush offense) and **MARION BARBER** (Dallas, No. 10).

GREEN BAY PACKERS (4-3) at TENNESSEE TITANS (7-0)

STORYLINE: The veteran against the (almost) rookie.

That would be 14-year, grey-whiskered **QB KERRY COLLINS** of the Titans vs. fourth-year **QB AARON RODGERS** in his first season as a starter.

Both have been impressive in ’08. Collins has led the Titans to their best start ever. He uses his experience to take what

NFL FACTOID

FAR FROM OVER: With clubs either having played half their games or approaching that benchmark this weekend, history proves that teams at 3-5 still have a chance for the playoffs. Since 1990, five 3-5 teams have advanced to the postseason: 1990 New Orleans, 1994 New England, 1995 Detroit, 1996 Jacksonville and the 2002 New York Jets.

teams give him and utilizes the Titans' two-pronged running game of pounder **LEN DALE WHITE** (most TDs in the league, 10) and outside man **CHRIS JOHNSON**, the team's first-round draft choice this year and the NFL's leading rookie rusher (626 yards).

"Kerry being a 14-year vet, with all the things he's done, I don't care how much talent a young quarterback has, they don't have that," says Tennessee **LB KEITH BULLUCK**. "They haven't played enough games."

Rodgers has shown Collins-esque ability to successfully manage games, even with an injured shoulder. He tops the league in third-down passer rating (120.3) with the most touchdowns (9) on that down. "I'd really like to have our last nine games be performances where I make good decisions, am smart with the football, and limit my turnovers," says Rodgers.

Indeed, turnovers could be the key to Sunday's game. The Packers lead the league in interceptions (13), while the Titans tie Tampa Bay for second-most (12).

Matchup to watch: The Titans' **ALBERT HAYNESWORTH** – called "the best DT I have seen in my time in the league" by former Jacksonville DE (and Jaguars radio announcer) **JEFF LAGEMAN** -- vs. Packers **RG DARYN COLLEDGE**.

NEW YORK JETS (4-3) at BUFFALO BILLS (5-2)

STORYLINE: *A Brett Buffalo jinx?*

Well, yes. Although it was while he was with Green Bay, Jets **QB BRETT FAVRE** has never won in Buffalo, losing to the Bills all three times he has played there.

So there's some Brett history on the line as the 5-2 Bills, tied for first with New England, try to keep down the Jets, one game off the pace in the AFC East at 4-3.

In addition to worrying about what Favre may pull off, the Bills have to prepare for "Mr. All-Purpose" himself, Jets **RB LEON WASHINGTON**. The 5-8, 202-pound sparkplug produced 274 all-purpose yards last week against Kansas City in rushing, receiving and kickoff and punt returns. Included were a receiving and rushing touchdown.

If the game is close – seven of the last eight meetings in the series have been decided by no more than 10 points – the teams are in good stead. **QB TRENT EDWARDS** of Buffalo (108.1) and Favre (105.4) both have 100.0 fourth-quarter passer ratings. But Brett, about that streak?

NEW ENGLAND PATRIOTS (5-2) at INDIANAPOLIS COLTS (3-4) (Sunday night, NBC, 8:15 PM ET)

STORYLINE: *Wouldn't seem like an NFL season without these two meeting!*

These former division rivals have clashed eight times since realignment in 2002 with the Patriots winning five of those meetings. Included have been three playoff games. No more than 10 points decided six of those eight games, including two AFC Championships.

But that was then, this is now. **MATT CASSEL** is quarterbacking the Patriots now, replacing an injured **TOM BRADY**. And the Colts, winners of the past five AFC South titles, are now four games behind undefeated Tennessee due to their 31-21 Monday-night loss to the Titans.

Meanwhile, Cassel, who backed up Brady for three years, is growing into the job. Last Sunday against St. Louis, he directed his first fourth-quarter Patriots comeback win (from a 16-13 deficit). "Matt is progressing in all areas, in his decision-making, his read in coverages and his pocket presence," says New England head coach **BILL BELICHICK**.

PITTSBURGH STEELERS (5-2) at WASHINGTON REDSKINS (6-2) (Monday night, ESPN, 8:30 PM ET)

STORYLINE: *It's West Coast vs. Blitzburgh!*

In other words, it's the multi-faceted, West Coast offense of Redskins rookie head coach **JIM ZORN** -- ranked seventh in the league – against the bring-it-all attack of Steelers defensive coordinator **DICK LE BEAU** -- now in his 50th consecutive NFL season on the field (the only active head/assistant coach with such a streak).

It's also a matchup of Steelers let's-go-for-it **QB BEN ROETHLISBERGER** against the more measured approach of the Redskins' **JASON CAMPBELL**, the lone ranked QB in the league not to throw an interception this year (the Redskins, with 360 consecutive attempts without an INT, have broken the NFL record of 281 such attempts by Oakland in 2001).

LeBeau will be sending his various packages from all angles in an attack that has accounted for the second-most sacks (25, behind the Giants' 26) in the league this year. But that push can be negated, as the Giants did last week by not surrendering a takedown. And Redskins **RB CLINTON PORTIS** – with a league-leading five consecutive 100-yard rush games – does an excellent job of picking up the blitz.

2008 NFL STANDINGS

American Football Conference - 2008 Regular Season																	
AFC East Team	W	L	T	▼Pct	PF	PA	Net Pts	TD	Home	Road	Div	Pct	Conf	Pct	Non-Conf	Streak	Last 5
New England Patriots	5	2	0	.714	153	132	21	15	3-1	2-1	1-1	.500	3-2	.600	2-0	2W	3-2
Buffalo Bills	5	2	0	.714	165	143	22	17	3-0	2-2	0-1	.000	3-1	.750	2-1	1L	3-2
New York Jets	4	3	0	.571	182	170	12	23	3-1	1-2	1-1	.500	3-3	.500	1-0	1W	3-2
Miami Dolphins	3	4	0	.429	145	146	-1	17	2-2	1-2	2-1	.667	3-3	.500	0-1	1W	3-2
AFC North Team	W	L	T	▼Pct	PF	PA	Net Pts	TD	Home	Road	Div	Pct	Conf	Pct	Non-Conf	Streak	Last 5
Pittsburgh Steelers	5	2	0	.714	155	110	45	18	2-1	3-1	3-0	1.000	5-0	1.000	0-2	1L	3-2
Baltimore Ravens	4	3	0	.571	134	110	24	15	3-1	1-2	2-1	.667	4-3	.571	0-0	2W	2-3
Cleveland Browns	3	4	0	.429	115	123	-8	11	1-2	2-2	1-2	.333	2-2	.500	1-2	1W	3-2
Cincinnati Bengals	0	6	0	.000	104	217	-113	10	0-3	0-5	0-3	.000	0-6	.000	0-2	8L	0-5
AFC South Team	W	L	T	▼Pct	PF	PA	Net Pts	TD	Home	Road	Div	Pct	Conf	Pct	Non-Conf	Streak	Last 5
Tennessee Titans	7	0	0	1.000	180	87	93	20	4-0	3-0	3-0	1.000	6-0	1.000	1-0	7W	5-0
Indianapolis Colts	3	4	0	.429	149	162	-13	19	1-2	2-2	1-2	.333	2-2	.500	1-2	2L	2-3
Jacksonville Jaguars	3	4	0	.429	141	151	-10	15	1-3	2-1	2-1	.667	3-4	.429	0-0	1L	3-2
Houston Texans	3	4	0	.429	175	185	-10	21	3-1	0-3	0-3	.000	2-4	.333	1-0	3W	3-2
AFC West Team	W	L	T	▼Pct	PF	PA	Net Pts	TD	Home	Road	Div	Pct	Conf	Pct	Non-Conf	Streak	Last 5
Denver Broncos	4	3	0	.571	173	195	-22	19	3-1	1-2	2-1	.667	2-3	.400	2-0	2L	2-3
San Diego Chargers	3	5	0	.375	224	199	25	25	2-1	1-4	1-1	.500	3-3	.500	0-2	2L	2-3
Oakland Raiders	2	5	0	.286	107	177	-70	9	1-2	1-3	1-2	.333	2-4	.333	0-1	1L	1-4
Kansas City Chiefs	1	6	0	.143	99	193	-94	11	1-2	0-4	1-1	.500	1-4	.200	0-2	3L	1-4
National Football Conference - 2008 Regular Season																	
NFC East Team	W	L	T	▼Pct	PF	PA	Net Pts	TD	Home	Road	Div	Pct	Conf	Pct	Non-Conf	Streak	Last 5
New York Giants	6	1	0	.857	191	115	76	19	4-0	2-1	1-0	1.000	4-0	1.000	2-1	2W	4-1
Washington Redskins	6	2	0	.750	165	145	20	17	3-1	3-1	2-1	.667	5-2	.714	1-0	2W	4-1
Dallas Cowboys	5	3	0	.625	202	184	18	25	3-1	2-2	1-1	.500	3-3	.500	2-0	1W	2-3
Philadelphia Eagles	4	3	0	.571	194	137	57	21	3-1	1-2	0-2	.000	3-3	.500	1-0	2W	3-2
NFC North Team	W	L	T	▼Pct	PF	PA	Net Pts	TD	Home	Road	Div	Pct	Conf	Pct	Non-Conf	Streak	Last 5
Chicago Bears	4	3	0	.571	196	150	46	22	2-1	2-2	2-0	1.000	3-3	.500	1-0	1W	3-2
Green Bay Packers	4	3	0	.571	194	159	35	23	2-2	2-1	2-0	1.000	3-3	.500	1-0	2W	2-3
Minnesota Vikings	3	4	0	.429	154	167	-13	15	2-1	1-3	1-2	.333	3-2	.600	0-2	1L	3-2
Detroit Lions	0	7	0	.000	114	212	-98	12	0-3	0-4	0-3	.000	0-6	.000	0-1	7L	0-5
NFC South Team	W	L	T	▼Pct	PF	PA	Net Pts	TD	Home	Road	Div	Pct	Conf	Pct	Non-Conf	Streak	Last 5
Carolina Panthers	6	2	0	.750	174	127	47	18	5-0	1-2	2-1	.667	4-2	.667	2-0	2W	4-1
Tampa Bay Buccaneers	5	3	0	.625	170	120	50	17	4-0	1-3	2-1	.667	5-2	.714	0-1	1L	3-2
Atlanta Falcons	4	3	0	.571	153	154	-1	15	3-0	1-3	0-2	.000	3-3	.500	1-0	1L	3-2
New Orleans Saints	4	4	0	.500	216	195	21	27	4-1	0-3	1-1	.500	2-3	.400	2-1	1W	3-2
NFC West Team	W	L	T	▼Pct	PF	PA	Net Pts	TD	Home	Road	Div	Pct	Conf	Pct	Non-Conf	Streak	Last 5
Arizona Cardinals	4	3	0	.571	200	171	29	25	3-0	1-3	1-0	1.000	2-2	.500	2-1	1L	2-3
Seattle Seahawks	2	5	0	.286	144	184	-40	15	1-2	1-3	2-1	.667	2-4	.333	0-1	1W	2-3
St. Louis Rams	2	5	0	.286	112	201	-89	10	1-2	1-3	0-1	.000	2-3	.400	0-2	1L	2-3
San Francisco 49ers	2	6	0	.250	171	230	-59	17	1-4	1-2	1-2	.333	2-5	.286	0-1	5L	0-5

x - Clinched playoff
 y - Clinched Wild Card
 z - Clinched Division
 * - Clinched Division and Homefield Advantage

LAST WEEK'S NFL RESULTS (OCTOBER 26-27)

(Home team in CAPS)

Byes: Chicago, Denver, Green Bay, Minnesota

Sunday, October 26

BALTIMORE 29, Oakland 10
CAROLINA 27, Arizona 23
DALLAS 13, Tampa Bay 9
Washington 25, DETROIT 17
MIAMI 25, Buffalo 16
NEW ENGLAND 23, St. Louis 16
NEW ORLEANS 37, San Diego 32 (London)
N.Y. JETS 28, Kansas City 24

Sunday, October 26, Cont.'d.

PHILADELPHIA 27, Atlanta 14
HOUSTON 35, Cincinnati 6
Cleveland 23, JACKSONVILLE 17
N.Y. Giants 21, PITTSBURGH 14
Seattle 34, SAN FRANCISCO 13

Monday, October 27

TENNESSEE 31, Indianapolis 21

WEEK 9 SCHEDULE – NOVEMBER 2-3

(All times local)

Byes: Carolina, New Orleans, San Diego, San Francisco

Sunday, November 2

N.Y. Jets at Buffalo, 1:00 PM
Detroit at Chicago, 12:00 PM
Jacksonville at Cincinnati, 1:00 PM
Baltimore at Cleveland, 1:00 PM
Tampa Bay at Kansas City, 12:00 PM
Houston at Minnesota, 12:00 PM
Arizona at St. Louis, 12:00 PM
Green Bay at Tennessee, 12:00 PM

Sunday, November 2, Cont.'d.

Miami at Denver, 2:05 PM
Dallas at N.Y. Giants, 4:15 PM
Atlanta at Oakland, 1:15 PM
Philadelphia at Seattle, 1:15 PM
New England at Indianapolis, 8:15 PM (NBC)

Monday, November 3

Pittsburgh at Washington, 8:30 PM (ESPN)