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THE DRAMA OF DECEMBER BEGINS;
FOUR WEEKS TO GO TO SEE WHO GOES

B-r-r-r-r, it's getting cold out there. Everyplace, of course, but in the NFL, where things are starting to sizzle.

It's December, which means that the final four weeks of the season with all its suspense and surprises are about to begin.

"A couple of weeks ago, all the games became must-wins," says running back SAMMY MORRIS of the New England Patriots. "Now there's even more emphasis on every game."

Nothing like four games to go to ratchet up the pressure. Five clubs can earn playoff berths this week. But teams could have clinched two weeks ago and did not. "You get everybody's best every week," says head coach JEFF FISHER of the Tennessee Titans, who can clinch the AFC South this week - and could have done so last week.

"Winning the division is a heck of a lot harder than people think," understates coach JON GRUDEN of the Tampa Bay Buccaneers, who this week face the team they are tied with for the lead in the NFC South, Carolina.

In the NFL, of course, nothing is predictable. Just look at last week, when 11 road teams won their games, one off the record for a week.

And the NFL goes to Canada this week when the Buffalo Bills host the Miami Dolphins in Toronto at the Rogers Centre in the first of five annual regular-season games the Bills will play in Canada's largest city.

Some of the key games as the December caldron starts to heat up:

PHILADELPHIA EAGLES (6-5-1) at NEW YORK GIANTS (11-1) (FOX, 1:00 PM ET)

STORYLINE: McNabb's back, Westbrook's back - but the Giants keep rolling.

Off their Thanksgiving-night performances in Philadelphia's win over Arizona, QB DONOVAN MC NABB (four TD passes) and RB BRIAN WESTBROOK (110 yards rushing, two TDs rushing, two receiving) look like they're ready to help the Eagles make a Wild Card run for it. Sunday, though, will be one tough test.

The Giants have not lost a division game since last December 16 (Washington) and are 6-0 this year at Giants Stadium, their longest home winning streak since seven in a row in 1990, their Super Bowl XXV-winning season.

Plus, whatever concoction Philly defensive coordinator JIM JOHNSON may cook up, the Giants could have an answer for it. Last week, the Redskins concentrated on shutting down New York's No. 1 NFL rushing game, so QB ELI MANNING simply went to the air for his first 300-yard passing game of the year. Adapting, it's called, and the Giants are great at it.

DALLAS COWBOYS (8-4) at PITTSBURGH STEELERS (9-3) (FOX, 4:15 PM ET)

STORYLINE: Romo's flinging, Blitzburgh's coming!

LENNY MOORE IS A BIG JOE FLACCO FAN!

LENNY MOORE was the starting halfback for the Baltimore Colts in the "Greatest Game Ever Played," the 1958 NFL Championship Game on December 28, 1958. The NFL is celebrating the 50th anniversary of the historic game this month, but the 75-year-old Moore, who lives in Randallstown, Maryland, is up-to-the-minute on the modern-day NFL - particularly his Baltimore Ravens, who face Washington this Sunday night in a big game on NBC (8:15 PM ET).

Lenny is a big fan of Ravens rookie quarterback JOE FLACCO, who has already taken Baltimore (8-4) to three more wins than it had in 2007. "Joe is very cool in the pocket, which is quite unusual for a first-year player," says Moore, a 1975 inductee into the Pro Football Hall of Fame. "He's nice and tall (6-6). He can see over everybody and spot his receivers. I was concerned after (left tackle) JONATHAN OGDEN retired this year, but the Ravens' offensive line has come along real well. All the credit for Baltimore's success this year goes to (rookie head coach) JOHN HARBAUGH."

What pinkie injury? **QB TONY ROMO** has led the Cowboys to three consecutive wins in spite of a broken passing-hand pinkie. He comes off a 331-yard, three-TD Thanksgiving game in which he led Dallas to touchdowns in its first three possessions and points in its first four in a 34-9 win over Seattle.

But this is "Terrible Towel" Pittsburgh with a QB, **BEN ROETHLISBERGER**, who is 14-4 lifetime against the NFC, and a defense that will blitz and confuse you to distraction. The Steelers rank first in the NFL in overall, rushing and passing defense. And that unit, under 71-year-old coordinator **DICK LE BEAU**, has yet to allow a 100-yard rushing or 300-yard passing performance this season and has surrendered 10 or fewer points in four of Pittsburgh's past five games.

With all of Romo and Roethlisberger's cannon arms, things could well come down to the blitzers. Three of the league's top six sackers will be in action – Dallas **LB DE MARCUS WARE** (NFL-leading 15.0 sacks) and Steelers **LBS JAMES HARRISON** (14.0) and **LA MARR WOODLEY** (11.5) – who already have the most sacks (25.5) of any tandem in a season in Steelers history.

OAKLAND RAIDERS (3-9) at SAN DIEGO CHARGERS (4-8) (Thursday night, NFL Network, 8:00 PM ET)

STORYLINE: LT against a junior LT?

Looks like the Raiders have that in mind when it comes to their first-round draft choice of this year, **RB DARREN MC FADDEN**. They are using him in the versatile role San Diego **RB LA DAINIAN TOMLINSON** has excelled in in his career (LT caught his 500th pass last Sunday to become the fifth RB in history with 10,000 rushing yards and 500 receptions).

Oakland is molding McFadden in the same fashion without, of course, taking away from his main strength, pounding it. Last week, the Raiders spotted him as a WR, a tailback, in a single-back set and in the "Wildcat."

Unfortunately for Oakland, Tomlinson has excelled in his key job – rushing – against them. His career highs against any team come against the Raiders – 377 carries for 1,815 yards for an against-the-AFC West-high 121.0 average.

Keep an eye on: Viewers should look for a guy who does not get much national attention -- Raiders second-year **TE ZACH MILLER**, who leads the team in catches (37) and NFL tight ends in average (14.0, minimum 30 catches)

WASHINGTON REDSKINS (7-5) at BALTIMORE RAVENS (8-4) (Sunday night, NBC, 8:15 PM ET)

STORYLINE: Battle of the Beltway!

Also a meeting of strong-running, tough-defense clubs who are both in the playoff scramble.

The Ravens are hot. They have won six of their past seven, scoring no less than 27 points in those six. Rookie **QB JOE FLACCO** (see Lenny Moore quotes above) has thrown 11 touchdowns against two interceptions and posted a 99.1 passer rating in that streak. "We have four games left and we need to continue to do what we've been doing," says Flacco. "That starts with Washington."

Let's see: a December night game outdoors? Could call for a rush attack. Both teams are equipped here, on both sides of the ball. The Redskins will pound the NFL's No. 2 rusher **CLINTON PORTIS** (1,228 yards). He goes against a defense that has not allowed a 100-yard rusher in a league-best 31 games. The Ravens, with the NFL's third-ranked rushing game (against the league's No. 7 rush defense), packed almost 500 pounds of beef into their backfield last week with **LE' RON MC CLAIN** (260 pounds) and rookie **RAY RICE** (200) carrying the load for a banged-up **WILLIS MC GAHEE**.

TAMPA BAY BUCCANEERS (9-3) at CAROLINA PANTHERS (9-3) (Monday night, ESPN, 8:30 PM ET)

STORYLINE: Battle for first in the South!

And are there a lot of scenarios in this one! First off, the NFC South is a scenario in itself. It joins the NFC East as the only division with all clubs with a .500 or better record. Since realignment in 2002, no team has repeated as the NFC South champion. And every team that finished last since '02 turned around to win the division the next year! Crazy!

The Panthers don't like seeing No. 7 -- Bucs **QB JEFF GARCIA**. The tough, resourceful veteran has beaten Carolina the last five times he has faced them. Of course, No. 17 – Panthers **QB JAKE DELHOMME** – hasn't been quiet this year, particularly at home. He has led Carolina to a 6-0 home record with the Cats outscoring their opponents 166-78.

Three game-changers to watch: Panthers **WR STEVE SMITH** has posted five 100-yard games in his past seven outings vs. the Bucs...Carolina **DE JULIUS PEPPERS**, moved around in alignments this year, has seven sacks in his past four games...and Tampa Bay **LB BARRETT RUUD**, not one of the better-known Bucs, basically never comes off the field, playing in all schemes -- nickel, dime, whatever -- and leads the club in solo tackles with an amazing 92.

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 York Jets	8	4	0	.667	340	268	72	40	4-2	4-2	3-1	.750	6-4	.600	2-0	1L	4-1
New England Patriots	7	5	0	.583	277	255	22	28	4-3	3-2	3-2	.600	5-5	.500	2-0	1L	2-3
Miami Dolphins	7	5	0	.583	253	257	-4	29	4-3	3-2	2-2	.500	5-4	.556	2-1	1W	4-1
Buffalo Bills	6	6	0	.500	276	259	17	29	3-3	3-3	0-3	.000	4-4	.500	2-2	1L	1-4

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	9	3	0	.750	269	170	99	29	4-2	5-1	4-0	1.000	8-1	.889	1-2	3W	4-1
Baltimore Ravens	8	4	0	.667	292	190	102	33	4-1	4-3	4-1	.800	7-3	.700	1-1	2W	4-1
Cleveland Browns	4	8	0	.333	213	247	-34	19	1-6	3-2	1-3	.250	3-6	.333	1-2	2L	1-4
Cincinnati Bengals	1	10	1	.125	151	310	-159	15	1-4-1	0-6	0-5	.000	1-8	.111	0-2-1	2L	1-3-1

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	11	1	0	.917	304	175	129	33	5-1	6-0	4-0	1.000	7-1	.875	4-0	1W	4-1
Indianapolis Colts	8	4	0	.667	257	250	7	30	3-2	5-2	2-2	.500	7-2	.778	1-2	5W	5-0
Houston Texans	5	7	0	.417	282	310	-28	32	4-2	1-5	1-4	.200	4-6	.400	1-1	2W	2-3
Jacksonville Jaguars	4	8	0	.333	241	270	-29	27	1-5	3-3	2-3	.400	3-7	.300	1-1	3L	1-4

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	7	5	0	.583	292	319	-27	33	3-3	4-2	2-2	.500	4-5	.444	3-0	1W	3-2
San Diego Chargers	4	8	0	.333	290	274	16	32	3-3	1-5	2-1	.667	4-5	.444	0-3	3L	1-4
Oakland Raiders	3	9	0	.250	172	265	-93	15	1-5	2-4	2-3	.400	3-6	.333	0-3	1L	1-4
Kansas City Chiefs	2	10	0	.167	216	340	-124	25	1-5	1-5	2-2	.500	2-6	.250	0-4	1W	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	11	1	0	.917	352	206	146	38	6-0	5-1	4-0	1.000	8-0	1.000	3-1	7W	5-0
Dallas Cowboys	8	4	0	.667	299	260	39	36	5-1	3-3	2-2	.500	6-4	.600	2-0	3W	4-1
Washington Redskins	7	5	0	.583	208	222	-14	21	3-4	4-1	2-3	.400	6-4	.600	1-1	1L	2-3
Philadelphia Eagles	6	5	1	.542	319	249	70	35	4-2	2-3-1	0-3	.000	5-4	.556	1-1-1	1W	2-2-1

NFC North Team	W	L	T	▼ Pct	PF	PA	Net Pts	TD	Home	Road	Div	Pct	Conf	Pct	Non-Conf	Streak	Last 5
Minnesota Vikings	7	5	0	.583	287	260	27	30	5-1	2-4	3-2	.600	5-3	.625	2-2	2W	4-1
Chicago Bears	6	6	0	.500	281	268	13	32	3-2	3-4	3-2	.600	5-5	.500	1-1	1L	2-3
Green Bay Packers	5	7	0	.417	334	295	39	38	3-3	2-4	3-1	.750	4-6	.400	1-1	2L	1-4
Detroit Lions	0	12	0	.000	203	393	-190	22	0-6	0-6	0-4	.000	0-9	.000	0-3	12L	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
Tampa Bay Buccaneers	9	3	0	.750	280	200	80	28	6-0	3-3	3-1	.750	8-2	.800	1-1	4W	4-1
Carolina Panthers	9	3	0	.750	285	231	54	32	6-0	3-3	2-2	.500	6-3	.667	3-0	1W	4-1
Atlanta Falcons	8	4	0	.667	298	242	56	32	5-1	3-3	2-2	.500	5-3	.625	3-1	2W	4-1
New Orleans Saints	6	6	0	.500	337	301	36	41	5-1	1-5	1-3	.250	3-5	.375	3-1	1L	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	7	5	0	.583	338	313	25	40	4-1	3-4	4-0	1.000	5-4	.556	2-1	2L	3-2
San Francisco 49ers	4	8	0	.333	262	313	-51	28	2-4	2-4	2-3	.400	3-7	.300	1-1	1W	2-3
Seattle Seahawks	2	10	0	.167	216	311	-95	23	1-5	1-5	2-2	.500	2-8	.200	0-2	5L	0-5
St. Louis Rams	2	10	0	.167	159	360	-201	13	1-5	1-5	0-3	.000	2-6	.250	0-4	6L	0-5

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

LAST WEEK'S NFL RESULTS (NOVEMBER 27, 30- DECEMBER 1)

(Home team in CAPS)

Thursday, November 27

Tennessee 47, DETROIT 10
DALLAS 34, Seattle 9
PHILADELPHIA 48, Arizona 20

Sunday, November 30

San Francisco 10, BUFFALO 3
Baltimore 34, CINCINNATI 3
Indianapolis 10, CLEVELAND 6
Carolina 35, GREEN BAY 31
Miami 16, ST. LOUIS 12

Sunday, November 30, Cont.'d.

TAMPA BAY 23, New Orleans 20
N.Y. Giants 23, WASHINGTON 7
Atlanta 22, SAN DIEGO 16
Pittsburgh 33, NEW ENGLAND 10
Denver 34, N.Y. JETS 17
Kansas City 20, OAKLAND 13
MINNESOTA 34, Chicago 14

Monday, December 1

HOUSTON 30, Jacksonville 17

WEEK 14 SCHEDULE – DECEMBER 4, 7- 8

(All times local)

Thursday, December 4

Oakland at San Diego, 5:00 PM (NFLN)

Sunday, December 7

Jacksonville at Chicago, 12:00 PM
Minnesota at Detroit, 1:00 PM
Houston at Green Bay, 12:00 PM
Cincinnati at Indianapolis, 1:00 PM
Atlanta at New Orleans, 12:00 PM
Philadelphia at N.Y. Giants, 1:00 PM
Cleveland at Tennessee, 12:00 PM

Sunday, December 7, Cont.'d.

Miami at Buffalo (Toronto), 4:05 PM
Kansas City at Denver, 2:05 PM
N.Y. Jets at San Francisco, 1:05 PM
New England at Seattle, 1:05 PM
St. Louis at Arizona, 2:15 PM
Dallas at Pittsburgh, 4:15 PM
Washington at Baltimore, 8:15 PM (NBC)

Monday, December 8

Tampa Bay at Carolina, 8:30 PM (ESPN)