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THREE WEEKS TO GO. LET THE BEDLAM BEGIN!

“People remember what you do in December.”

So says head coach **JOHN FOX** of the Carolina Panthers about the crunch time that is now upon the NFL.

The final three weeks of the season are here, and aside from the division-winning Arizona Cardinals, New York Giants and Tennessee Titans, it’s a mad race for the nine remaining playoff spots among the 19 still-eligible clubs.

There’s sure to be some twists and turns in that race. Just look at last week. The Giants were sailing along at 11-1 and lose to the 6-5-1 Eagles. Warm-weather Houston goes into three-degree Green Bay and tops the Packers. The Steelers come back from a 10-point fourth-quarter deficit to beat the Cowboys.

It all tightens the playoff pressure. “Nobody said this was going to be easy,” says head coach **TONY SPARANO**, who has taken the 1-15 Miami Dolphins of last year into a three-way tie (at 8-5) for first in the AFC East. “Not in this league.”

So as the final surge begins, here are some of the key Week 15 games:

NEW ORLEANS SAINTS (7-6) at CHICAGO BEARS (7-6) (Thursday night, NFL Network, 8:00 PM ET)

STORYLINE: Are they with the right teams?

It sure seems that **PIERRE THOMAS** of New Orleans and **MATT FORTÉ** of Chicago -- who can play a main role on the ground this cold December night right by Lake Michigan -- should be playing for the *other* team. Thomas – with the French first name -- was born in Chicago, went to Illinois, was not drafted but signed as a rookie free agent with the Saints last year. He comes off his second career 100-yard rush game (102 yards and two TDs against Atlanta). His first? Last December 30 (105 yards) in Chicago. “He’s a great young talent,” says Saints **FB MIKE KARNEY**.

For Chicago? Their main guy is from – Louisiana. And he’s got that French *last* name. That’s rookie Forté, who was born in Slidell, Louisiana -- a suburb of New Orleans -- and went to Tulane. He is the second-leading rookie rusher in the league with 1,081 yards.

These ground games aside, the big question will be can **QB DREW BREES** and the Saints’ No. 1 NFL passing offense perform up to its fireworks level outdoors in the December night? New Orleans went to a more balanced run/pass attack last week in topping Atlanta.

PITTSBURGH STEELERS (10-3) at BALTIMORE RAVENS (9-4) (Sunday, CBS, 4:15 PM ET)

STORYLINE: Protecting the lead...and going for it.

That’s the story for this one Sunday. First-place Pittsburgh holds a one-game edge over Baltimore in the AFC North, so a win by the Ravens will tighten things even more.

“We want to be division champs,” says Ravens rookie head coach **JOHN HARBAUGH**, who has led the club from a 5-11

’58 CHAMPIONSHIP DOCUMENTARY ON ESPN SATURDAY; RAYMOND BERRY REMEMBERS THE GAME

ESPN will broadcast its special documentary, “The Greatest Game Ever Played,” on the 1958 NFL Championship sudden-death overtime between the Baltimore Colts and New York Giants this Saturday (December 13) at 9:00 PM ET.

What did it feel like to play in that game? Pro Football Hall of Famer **RAYMOND BERRY**, who caught 12 passes for 178 yards and one TD for the Colts in the epic, remembers: “It was the No. 1 thrill of my career. It was impossible to describe the feeling. You have to experience it to understand. Whether we were on the Colts or Giants, we were a very fortunate group of guys. To be a part of this game was the bonus that none of us could have thought would ever happen.”

finish last season to its 9-4 mark. "We're not backing down from the fact that that's our goal."

Both teams are on streaks. The Ravens have won seven of their past eight with rookie **QB JOE FLACCO** throwing at least one TD pass in those games. The Steelers have won five of their last six, including their 10-point comeback thriller over Dallas last Sunday. The Ravens like this streak: Pittsburgh has lost its last five in Baltimore.

On paper, this should be one intense defensive battle. It's a matchup between the first (Pittsburgh) and second-ranked defensive units in the NFL. And it's also a meeting of two of the best safeties in the league – **TROY POLAMALU** of Pittsburgh (with a league-leading seven interceptions) and **ED REED** of Baltimore (tied for No. 2 with five pickoffs). "Reed is probably the best safety, him and Polamalu, that I've played against," says Washington **QB JASON CAMPBELL**. "Those guys are relentless."

DENVER BRONCOS (8-5) at CAROLINA PANTHERS (10-3) (Sunday, CBS, 4:15 PM ET)

STORYLINE: One's good on the road, the other's unbeaten at home. Plus, they're first-place teams.

Should be quite an inter-conference battle. The Broncos have won three in a row on the road (and are 3-0 vs. the NFC South this year). The Panthers, coming off their 38-23 Monday night home win over Tampa Bay, have yet to lose at home this season (7-0). "We're protecting our home," says Carolina **DE JULIUS PEPPERS**. "That's what we need to continue to do."

It will be a battle of philosophies. Denver, with **QB JAY CUTLER**, tends to go to the air, and has the No. 3 pass offense in the league (Cutler has not been sacked in his past three games). Carolina, meanwhile, rebuilt its offensive line this offseason and drafted Oregon **RB JONATHAN STEWART** in the first round to pair up with **DE ANGELO WILLIAMS**.

Result? The No. 4 rush attack in the league, and the distinction of being the only team with two rushers in the league's top-20 – Williams (1,141 yards) and Stewart (699). The duo became on Monday night the first teammates in history to each rush for 100 yards, score two rushing touchdowns and average 7.0 yards per carry.

NEW YORK GIANTS (11-2) at DALLAS COWBOYS (8-5) (Sunday night, NBC, 8:15 PM ET)

STORYLINE: Sailing along, then – whoops!

That's the story of these two, although a lot of teams wouldn't mind having their records. There were the Giants zooming along with seven wins in a row until division-rival Philadelphia topped them 20-14 last Sunday. Turned out New York clinched the NFC East anyway because Dallas lost to Pittsburgh after winning three in a row.

So, where does that bring us? To a rouser Sunday night. With a win or other scenarios, the Giants earn a first-round bye. The Cowboys need to keep winning to insure a playoff berth.

New York wants to get back to its No. 1-ranked NFL ground game, led by **BRANDON JACOBS**, who rumbled for 117 yards against Dallas in Week 9. Philly limited the Giants to 88 yards. If **RB MARION BARBER**'s toe limits him, the national TV audience will get a look at rookie **TASHARD CHOICE**, who rushed for the most yards vs. Pittsburgh this year, 88, and added 78 receiving. Plus, there's always **QB TONY ROMO** – third in the league in passer rating -- just flinging it.

"There is not going to be any lack of motivation on either side and it is going to be a great game to be a part of," says center **SHAUN O'HARA** of the Giants, who are 5-4 in their last nine games in Dallas, including the playoffs. "It is a Sunday night game, so everybody is going to be jacked up and it certainly does have other implications for both teams."

CLEVELAND BROWNS (4-9) at PHILADELPHIA EAGLES (7-5-1) (Monday night, ESPN, 8:30 PM ET)

STORYLINE: Eagles are getting hot!

One of the best teams in the NFL in December with a 29-17 (.630) record the past 10 years, Philadelphia has won its last two to pull itself back into the playoff picture.

"It's a long, long season," says Eagles head coach **ANDY REID**. "Anything can happen. We've got three more games that we have to take care of business with. We have the Browns coming in here. They have four wins and three of those have been on the road. It's not a time to sit back and relax."

An interesting pairing to watch will be two Washington, DC-born playmakers – Philadelphia's **BRIAN WESTBROOK** (age 29) and Cleveland's **JOSHUA CRIBBS** (23). Like Cribbs does now, Westbrook returned kicks early in his career. They are both versatile as runners, receivers and in Cribbs' case, even at QB (which he was at Kent State). The Browns are aiming to work him even more into the offense this week.

For what it's worth: Cleveland and Philadelphia are the only teams to beat the Giants this year.

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	5	0	.615	354	292	62	42	4-2	4-3	3-1	.750	6-4	.600	2-1	2L	3-2
New England Patriots	8	5	0	.615	301	276	25	30	4-3	4-2	3-2	.600	5-5	.500	3-0	1W	3-2
Miami Dolphins	8	5	0	.615	269	260	9	30	4-3	4-2	3-2	.600	6-4	.600	2-1	2W	4-1
Buffalo Bills	6	7	0	.462	279	275	4	29	3-4	3-3	0-4	.000	4-5	.444	2-2	2L	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	10	3	0	.769	289	183	106	31	5-2	5-1	4-0	1.000	8-1	.889	2-2	4W	4-1
Baltimore Ravens	9	4	0	.692	316	200	116	36	5-1	4-3	4-1	.800	7-3	.700	2-1	3W	4-1
Cleveland Browns	4	9	0	.308	222	275	-53	19	1-6	3-3	1-3	.250	3-7	.300	1-2	3L	1-4
Cincinnati Bengals	1	11	1	.115	154	345	-191	15	1-4-1	0-7	0-5	.000	1-9	.100	0-2-1	3L	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
z- Tennessee Titans	12	1	0	.923	332	184	148	37	6-1	6-0	4-0	1.000	8-1	.889	4-0	2W	4-1
Indianapolis Colts	9	4	0	.692	292	253	39	35	4-2	5-2	2-2	.500	8-2	.800	1-2	6W	5-0
Houston Texans	6	7	0	.462	306	331	-25	34	4-2	2-5	1-4	.200	4-6	.400	2-1	3W	3-2
Jacksonville Jaguars	4	9	0	.308	251	293	-42	28	1-5	3-4	2-3	.400	3-7	.300	1-2	4L	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	8	5	0	.615	316	336	-20	36	4-3	4-2	3-2	.600	5-5	.500	3-0	2W	4-1
San Diego Chargers	5	8	0	.385	324	281	43	36	4-3	1-5	3-1	.750	5-5	.500	0-3	1W	2-3
Oakland Raiders	3	10	0	.231	179	299	-120	16	1-5	2-5	2-4	.333	3-7	.300	0-3	2L	1-4
Kansas City Chiefs	2	11	0	.154	233	364	-131	27	1-5	1-6	2-3	.400	2-7	.222	0-4	1L	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
z- New York Giants	11	2	0	.846	366	226	140	40	6-1	5-1	4-1	.800	8-1	.889	3-1	1L	4-1
Dallas Cowboys	8	5	0	.615	312	280	32	37	5-1	3-4	2-2	.500	6-4	.600	2-1	1L	3-2
Philadelphia Eagles	7	5	1	.577	339	263	76	37	4-2	3-3-1	1-3	.250	6-4	.600	1-1-1	2W	2-2-1
Washington Redskins	7	6	0	.538	218	246	-28	22	3-4	4-2	2-3	.400	6-4	.600	1-2	2L	1-4
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	8	5	0	.615	307	276	31	32	5-1	3-4	4-2	.667	6-3	.667	2-2	3W	4-1
Chicago Bears	7	6	0	.538	304	278	26	34	4-2	3-4	3-2	.600	5-5	.500	2-1	1W	2-3
Green Bay Packers	5	8	0	.385	355	319	36	41	3-4	2-4	3-1	.750	4-6	.400	1-2	3L	1-4
Detroit Lions	0	13	0	.000	219	413	-194	23	0-7	0-6	0-5	.000	0-10	.000	0-3	13L	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	10	3	0	.769	323	254	69	37	7-0	3-3	3-2	.600	7-3	.700	3-0	2W	4-1
Tampa Bay Buccaneers	9	4	0	.692	303	238	65	31	6-0	3-4	3-2	.600	8-3	.727	1-1	1L	4-1
Atlanta Falcons	8	5	0	.615	323	271	52	35	5-1	3-4	2-3	.400	5-4	.556	3-1	1L	3-2
New Orleans Saints	7	6	0	.538	366	326	40	44	6-1	1-5	2-3	.400	4-5	.444	3-1	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
z- Arizona Cardinals	8	5	0	.615	372	323	49	44	5-1	3-4	5-0	1.000	6-4	.600	2-1	1W	3-2
San Francisco 49ers	5	8	0	.385	286	327	-41	31	3-4	2-4	2-3	.400	3-7	.300	2-1	2W	3-2
Seattle Seahawks	2	11	0	.154	237	335	-98	26	1-6	1-5	2-2	.500	2-8	.200	0-3	6L	0-5
St. Louis Rams	2	11	0	.154	169	394	-225	14	1-5	1-6	0-4	.000	2-7	.222	0-4	7L	0-5

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

LAST WEEK'S NFL RESULTS (DECEMBER 4, 7- 8)

(Home team in CAPS)

Thursday, December 4

SAN DIEGO 34, Oakland 7

Sunday, December 7

CHICAGO 23, Jacksonville 10

Minnesota 20, DETROIT 16

Houston 24, GREEN BAY 21

INDIANAPOLIS 35, Cincinnati 3

NEW ORLEANS 29, Atlanta 25

Philadelphia 20, N.Y. GIANTS 14

TENNESSEE 28, Cleveland 9

Sunday, December 7, Cont.'d.

Miami 16, BUFFALO 3 (Toronto)

DENVER 24, Kansas City 17

SAN FRANCISCO 24, N.Y. Jets 14

New England 24, SEATTLE 21

ARIZONA 34, St. Louis 10

PITTSBURGH 20, Dallas 13

BALTIMORE 24, Washington 10

Monday, December 8

CAROLINA 38, Tampa Bay 23

WEEK 15 SCHEDULE – DECEMBER 11, 14-15

(All times local)

Thursday, December 11

New Orleans at Chicago, 7:00 PM (NFLN)

Sunday, December 14

Tampa Bay at Atlanta, 1:00 PM

Washington at Cincinnati, 1:00 PM

Tennessee at Houston, 12:00 PM

Detroit at Indianapolis, 1:00 PM

Green Bay at Jacksonville, 1:00 PM

San Diego at Kansas City, 12:00 PM

San Francisco at Miami, 1:00 PM

Sunday, December 14, Cont.'d.

Buffalo at N.Y. Jets, 1:00 PM

Seattle at St. Louis, 12:00 PM

Minnesota at Arizona, 2:05 PM

Pittsburgh at Baltimore, 4:15 PM

Denver at Carolina, 4:15 PM

New England at Oakland, 1:15 PM

N.Y. Giants at Dallas, 8:15 PM (NBC)

Monday, December 15

Cleveland at Philadelphia, 8:30 PM (ESPN)