

NFL 2011

Find John Rodino's picks each Sunday in The World-Herald

NOTES

Polamalu will retire as Steeler

PITTSBURGH — Troy Polamalu never planned on leaving the Pittsburgh Steelers.

Still, the defending AFC champions didn't want to take any chances, signing the star safety to a contract extension through the 2014 season.

Polamalu, the 2010 defensive player of the year, actually signed the contract at Pittsburgh International Airport on Saturday just before the team boarded a plane to Baltimore.

The 30-year-old took to his Twitter account to announce the deal, tweeting "I am happy to say that I will retire a Pittsburgh Steeler!"

Terms were not immediately disclosed. Polamalu was scheduled to make \$6.4 million this season.

The perennial Pro Bowler enjoyed perhaps the finest season of his career in 2010, finishing with seven interceptions, 64 combined tackles and a sack. Polamalu was ready to start the final year of a five-year deal he signed in 2007. The Steelers typically do not negotiate contracts once the season begins. They got it in just under the wire, saving both sides from a potential distraction over the next five months.

The contract is the third extension the Steelers have handed out to defensive starters since training camp opened. Linebackers Lawrence Timmons and LaMarr Woodley both agreed to long-term deals last month and Polamalu's signing gives the Steelers stability well into the future. Pittsburgh returns all 11 defensive starters from a unit that led the league in points against a year ago.

Peterson signs long-term deal

MINNEAPOLIS — Adrian Peterson thinks he's the best running back in the game. Now he's getting paid like it, too.

Peterson agreed Saturday to a contract extension with the Vikings that includes \$36 million in guaranteed money and as much as \$100 million in the next seven years if he plays that long with Minnesota.

The deal came five days after the Vikings locked up linebacker Chad Greenway to a lucrative long-term contract.

Peterson has begun the final year of his rookie deal on a \$10.72 million salary and was in prime position for a big payday.

After setting the NFL's single-game rushing record with 296 yards against San Diego in 2007, Peterson has been picked for the Pro Bowl in each of his four seasons. He's already second in Vikings history behind Robert Smith with 5,782 yards rushing for his career, and his 54 touchdowns the last four years are the most in the league during that span.

"Adrian loves playing for the Minnesota Vikings," agent Ben Dogra said. "Deep inside he wanted to finish his career with the Minnesota Vikings."

Selmon remembered as a humble star

OKLAHOMA CITY — The First Southern Baptist Church was packed with people from all walks of life Saturday. They all loved and respected Lee Roy Selmon.

More than 700 mourners paid final respects to the Pro Football Hall of Famer and one of the best players in Oklahoma football history. Much like the funeral service Friday in Lutz, Fla., the service in Selmon's home state focused on a life that went much deeper than what he did on the football field.

"The love between Lee Roy and the state of Oklahoma cannot be measured," brother Dewey said.

Dewey was one of seven speakers to eulogize his younger brother, who died last Sunday, two days after suffering a stroke at his Florida home. He was 56.

They all told stories during the three-hour service of a man, who despite an incredible list of athletic successes, refused to see himself as a superstar.

In other news

» **Giants:** Placed middle linebacker Jonathan Goff on injured reserve and signed rookie defensive end Justin Trattou from their practice squad. Goff tore the anterior cruciate ligament in his right knee.

» **Jets:** Signed cornerback Isaiah Trufant from the practice squad and waived wide receiver Mardy Gilyard.

» **Panthers:** Agreed to a five-year contact extension with strong safety Charles Godfrey on Saturday. Doug Hendrickson, Godfrey's agent, said the deal is worth \$27.5 million overall, \$12.4 million guaranteed.

» **Raiders:** Will be without tight end Kevin Boss for their season opener at Denver on Monday night. Boss was ruled out of the game Saturday because of a knee strain he suffered against San Francisco in the preseason on Aug. 20.

» **Redskins:** Owner Daniel Snyder dropped his defamation lawsuit against Washington City Paper and one of its writers. Snyder had wanted \$1 million in damages. He contended a Nov. 19 cover story, "The Cranky Redskins Fan's Guide to Dan Snyder," libeled Snyder by stating that he committed a crime.

» **Seahawks:** Signed former New Orleans defensive tackle Anthony Hargrove, adding depth to a depleted offensive line. To make room on the roster, the team released defensive tackle Landon Cohen.

— The Associated Press



LOVE IT OR HATE IT, FANTASY FOOTBALL IS BACK

Fantasy football brings us together.

This isn't necessarily a good thing.

"No way!" says my brother Jack, as a fellow league member steps into the room, beverage in hand, ready to watch Thursday's season-opening showdown between the Packers and the Saints. Noah keeps a keen eye on the injury reports, which is probably a contributing factor to his reputation in our league for making a ridiculous amount of waiver-wire transactions (he's already up to eight in the seven days since our draft was finalized). He also just told Jack of Peyton Manning's neck surgery, which could end the quarterback's season before the first snap.

Jack asks me to verify the news — this could be some evil ploy to snag Manning, my brother's QB1, on the cheap, right? I open a new tab in my browser, next to our league's live scoreboard.

Manning. Surgery. Out. Boom.

"I knew I should have drafted Tony Romo!" my brother, an avid Cowboys fan, howls as his clenched fists move

toward his head, ready to remove handfuls of hair. He claims to have picked Peyton out of principle. After all, he says, you can't play favorites with bragging rights on the line.

This is why I play fantasy football.

My brother's pacing now, trying to sell himself on his backup.

"Joe Flacco's solid," he says, though almost asking, looking at Noah and me searchingly. The television crawl mentions Manning, and I notice Jack's hands are outstretched, palms up, like he's weighing something imaginary. Can he feel the trophy, slipping out of his hands?

I think back to 2008, when I drafted Tom Brady only to watch him go down with a knee injury a little over 7½ minutes into the season. I think of the ensuing emptiness on my roster where Brady used to perch. I think about my roster this year. I think about the guy backing up Michael Vick on my bench.

And I turn to my brother.

"Would you want to trade for Eli?"

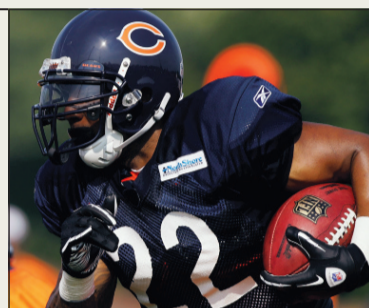
— **Graham Archer**

GAME OF THE WEEK

Falcons at Bears

Noon | TV: KPTM

The NFL's victors get few spoils — instead, it's tougher schedules — so these division champions top Sunday's card. Bears quarterback Jay Cutler took beatings at times last season, and now he's working with a new center, probably Roberto Garza. Can rookie right tackle Gabe Carimi impact the offensive line right away? Look for more of the running game, with **Matt Forte** and newcomer Marion Barber, when he's healthy. Will linebacker Lance Briggs' contract squawking disrupt a solid defense? The Bears will need all the defense they can get against an explosive Falcons attack that added speedy receiver Julio Jones in the draft. The Falcons brought in former Colts cornerback Kelvin Hayden and ex-Patriots safety James Sanders for a secondary that was exposed by Green Bay in the playoffs.



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Line: Falcons by 2½

Last meeting: Falcons beat Bears 21-14, Oct. 18, 2009



Bears 19-17

MATCHUPS

Steelers at Ravens

Line: Ravens by 1½

Noon **TV:** None

Bengals at Browns

Line: Browns by 6½

Noon **TV:** None

Colts at Texans

Line: Texans by 8½

Noon **TV:** None

Titans at Jaguars

Line: Jaguars by 2

Noon **TV:** None

Bills at Chiefs

Line: Chiefs by 5½

Noon **TV:** KMTV

Eagles at Rams

Line: Eagles by 4

Noon **TV:** None

Lions at Bucs

Line: Bucs by 1½

Noon **TV:** None

Panthers at Cardinals

Line: Cardinals by 7

3:15 p.m. **TV:** None

Vikings at Chargers

Line: Chargers by 8½

3:15 p.m. **TV:** KPTM

Seahawks at 49ers

Line: 49ers by 5½

3:15 p.m. **TV:** None

Giants at Redskins

Line: Giants by 3

3:15 p.m. **TV:** None

Cowboys at Jets

Line: Jets by 5½

7:20 p.m. **TV:** NBC

GAME OUTLOOK

Last meeting: Steelers beat Ravens 31-24, Jan. 15, 2011

Lowdown: These two resume a seemingly annual street fight for the AFC North title in Week 1. Even as runners-up, will the Steelers have that Super Bowl hangover that dogged the 2009 club? Receivers Hines Ward and Emmanuel Sanders are banged up. Newly-acquired wideout Lee Evans boosts the Ravens. More offense helps an aging defense that showed cracks last season.

Last meeting: Bengals beat Browns 19-17, Dec. 19, 2010

Lowdown: We go from top-notch matchups to the AFC's dog game of the week. At least the Browns have a promising quarterback in Colt McCoy, hard-running Peyton Hillis and do-it-all receiver/return man Josh Cribbs. After a lousy 2010, the Bengals added a worse offseason. Quarterback Carson Palmer quit on them, so rookie Andy Dalton replaces him in a virtual no-name offense.

Last meeting: Colts beat Texans 30-17, Nov. 1, 2010

Lowdown: Actually, both teams are in flux. Iron man quarterback Peyton Manning's sudden vulnerability casts a shadow over Indianapolis' season. But Kerry Collins, also a past Super Bowl QB, isn't chopped liver. The Texans, even with rushing champion Arian Foster providing balance, lost eight of their last 10 in 2010. Foster (hamstring) could be a game-time decision.

Last meeting: Jaguars beat Titans 17-6, Dec. 5, 2010

Lowdown: Longtime Titans coach Jeff Fisher (replaced by Mike Munchak) and quarterback Vince Young left. And how effective will one-time 2,000-yard rusher Chris Johnson be after his holdout? Is new QB Matt Hasselbeck keeping the seat warm for Jake Locker? With Luke McCown or rookie Blaine Gabbert at QB, the Jaguars will probably overwork running back Maurice Jones-Drew, again.

Last meeting: Chiefs beat Bills 13-10 in OT, Oct. 31, 2010

Lowdown: Todd Haley's comets of 2010 are lucky to open at home against the downtrodden Bills. K.C. lost tight end Tony Moeaki to a knee injury in the preseason. Quarterback Matt Cassel, who said last Monday he would play in the opener, has sore ribs. The Chiefs beat up on a lot of mediocre teams in winning the AFC West, but now it's time to take the next step.

Last meeting: Eagles beat Rams 38-3, Sept. 7, 2008

Lowdown: After the lockout ended, the Eagles signed more big names than George Steinbrenner used to. Highlights: cornerback Nnamdi Asomugha, defensive linemen Cullen Jenkins and Jason Babin, running back Ronnie Brown. And they'll fatten up with an easy early schedule. That Week 17 loss to Seattle dimmed what had been an inspiring season for QB Sam Bradford and the Rams.

Last meeting: Lions beat Buccaneers 23-20 in OT, Dec. 19, 2010

Lowdown: The big, bad Lions, with Ndamukong Suh and that pass rush, have been the buzz. But the offensive line is another story. The big need is continuity: QB Matt Stafford has to play a full year. Don't discount Tampa Bay, which missed the playoffs with 10 wins. The Bucs are also building with youth (QB Josh Freeman, defensive tackle Gerald McCoy, running back LeGarrette Blount).

Last meeting: Panthers beat Cardinals 19-12, Dec. 9, 2010

Lowdown: Even after all the offseason speculation and, finally, the Cardinals' acquisition of prized quarterback Kevin Kolb, we likely won't learn much from this game. Even if Kolb beats a team that was 2-14, he still hasn't beaten anyone. More intriguing is the Carolina debut of QB Cam Newton. New Panthers coach Ron Rivera has excelled as a defensive coordinator.

Last meeting: Vikings beat Chargers 35-17, Nov. 4, 2007

Lowdown: The Vikings go from one old man (Brett Favre) to another as Donovan McNabb takes his turn at quarterback. He's likely going to run a ball control offense, with plenty of Adrian Peterson, but without an impact No. 1 receiver (hello, Percy Harvin). The Chargers still resemble Air Coryell, with MVP candidate Philip Rivers throwing to Antonio Gates, Vincent Jackson and Malcom Floyd.

Last meeting: 49ers beat Seahawks 40-21, Dec. 12, 2010

Lowdown: Both teams are rolling the dice with quarterbacks. After Matt Hasselbeck walked as a free agent, Seattle turned to ex-Viking Tarvaris Jackson and kept backup Charlie Whitehurst. Can you say "unproven"? New 49ers coach Jim Harbaugh is starting Alex Smith — the cat with nine lives — in re-installing the West Coast offense.

Last meeting: Giants beat Redskins 17-14, Jan. 2, 2011

Lowdown: The Redskins were a soap opera even during the summer of labor distress. They finally unloaded defensive lineman Albert Haynesworth on the Patriots and McNabb on the Vikings. Rex Grossman looks like the new starter at QB. The Giants' defense is hurting, with top cornerback Terrell Thomas (knee) out and end Osi Umenyiora (knee) probably out.

Last meeting: Cowboys beat Jets 34-3, Nov. 22, 2007

Lowdown: Dallas has to give Felix Jones carries, or this team is going to be predictably pass-happy. Quarterback Tony Romo is 31 years old, and his window for getting to a Super Bowl is shrinking. The Cowboys did improve late last season when Jason Garrett became the coach. The defense-minded Jets may be more explosive with Plaxico Burress joining clutch receiver Santonio Holmes.

Monday's games: Patriots at Dolphins (6 p.m., ESPN), Raiders at Broncos (9:15 p.m., ESPN).

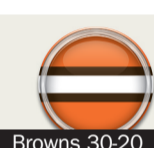
Capsules and predictions by **John Rodino**. | Predictions not related to point spreads.

Last season: 160-96 (.625). Playoffs: 8-3. Information from the Associated Press was used in this outlook.

PREDICTIONS



Steelers 23-20



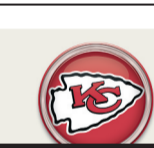
Browns 30-20



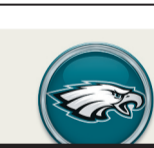
Texans 35-31



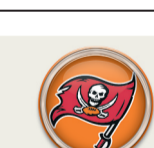
Jaguars 23-16



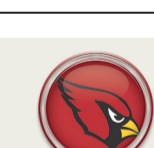
Chiefs 20-10



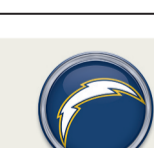
Eagles 31-21



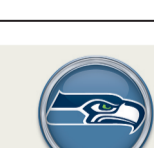
Bucs 22-17



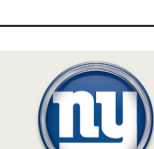
Cardinals 28-14



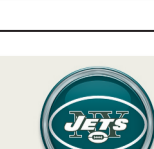
Chargers 33-20



Seahawks 24-23



Giants 28-21



Jets 26-20



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SMART TO START

QUARTERBACKS

Kyle Orton, QB, Broncos: If you own Orton, he's likely one of two viable options for you. Orton goes up against a Raiders' secondary that got worse in the offseason with the unloading of Nnamdi Asomugha. And even if Orton hasn't quieted any preseason rumors of being usurped atop the depth chart, the Denver coaching staff won't pull the plug in Week 1. Don't forget — the Broncos' QB shot out of the gate and quickly became a fantasy standout in the first half of 2010.

Others: Rex Grossman (Redskins), Eli Manning (Giants), Josh Freeman (Bucs).

RUNNING BACKS

Felix Jones, Cowboys: The Jets may have a top-tier defense, but the Cowboys have enough pieces on offense to keep them honest. Jones should shoulder more carries this season with the exodus of time-share sidekick Marion Barber, and even though the Cowboys still have other viable options in the backfield, they'll have to prove themselves before whittling away at Jones' workload.

Others: Tim Hightower (Redskins), Benjie Wells (Cardinals).

WIDE RECEIVERS

Chad Ochocinco, Patriots: Ochocinco may not be your most solid option — he's yet to play a game that means anything since his move to New England — but he still has the skill set to be a solid receiver. He'll have to share targets with a number of other Patriot pass-catchers, but QB Tom Brady has a way of maximizing the potential of his teammates.

Others: Brandon Marshall (Dolphins), Anquan Boldin (Ravens).

FIT TO SIT

QUARTERBACKS

Kerry Collins, Colts: Such opportunity! Grade A receivers, a top-level tight end and a matchup against the Texans, 2010's worst defense against the pass. Don't buy it. Collins has had mere weeks to learn a new offense — and a fairly complicated one that Peyton Manning had years to master. And with the Colts' run game lacking a bit of fear factor for opposing defenses, expect Houston to be able to make plays and shut down Indianapolis' offensive playmakers.

Others: Joe Flacco (Ravens), Ryan Fitzpatrick (Bills).

RUNNING BACKS

Reggie Bush, Dolphins: Bush may be due for more playing time in Miami than he's seen since his college days, but don't expect those extra carries to convert into fantasy points. He averaged fewer than five fantasy points per game last season, so even if he managed to double his touches (and that's a big if, given that Bush could eventually work his way into seeing the field only on passing downs), he wouldn't be someone you'd be excited about sliding into your lineup.

Others: BenJarvus Green-Ellis (Patriots), Joseph Addai (Colts).

WIDE RECEIVERS

Kenny Britt, Titans: Britt is the clear No. 1 wideout in Tennessee, but that's not saying much, especially early in the season. He hasn't had much opportunity to work with imported QB Matt Hasselbeck, and Titans running back Chris Johnson could be a bit rusty after an extended contract dispute. Defenses will be able to focus on Britt, which means you should look elsewhere.

Others: Percy Harvin (Vikings), Jeremy Maclin (Eagles)

— **Graham Archer**