

MBSW

Mountain Brook Sports Writers

FANTASY FOOTBALL PREVIEW

FOOTBALL IS HERE. WELL, NOT QUITE YET. THIS SUNDAY, AUGUST 7TH, THE GREEN BAY PACKERS FACE THE INDIANAPOLIS COLTS IN THE ANNUAL HALL OF FAME GAME. AND SO, AT 7 O’CLOCK ON SUNDAY, THE WAIT WILL OFFICIALLY CONCLUDE. FOOTBALL, IN AND OF ITSELF, IS A BEAUTIFUL GAME. WITH ALL THE MEDIA ATTENTION THE NEGATIVE ASPECTS OF FOOTBALL HAVE RECEIVED OF LATE, SUCH AS CTE, IT IS IMPORTANT TO TRULY ADMIRE THIS WONDERFUL GAME. PLAYING FOOTBALL IS GREAT, BUT WATCHING IT IS EVEN BETTER. AND, FOR SOME LEVELS OF FOOTBALL, NAMELY HIGH SCHOOL AND COLLEGE, WATCHING IT IS ENOUGH. BUT THEN COMES THE NATIONAL FOOTBALL LEAGUE. IN ORDER TO BE ABLE TO DEVOTE ONESELF TO SUCH A MALICIOUS GAME, ANOTHER ANGLE OF INVOLVEMENT MUST BE POSSIBLE. ENTER FANTASY FOOTBALL. THERE IS NOTHING LIKE TURNING ON NFL REDZONE ON A SUNDAY AFTERNOON, AND WATCHING YOUR “TEAM” SCORE TOUCHDOWN AFTER TOUCHDOWN. AND SO, AS YOU AND YOUR LEAGUE PREPARE FOR YOUR ANNUAL PRESEASON NFL DRAFT, WE TAKE A LOOK AT POSSIBLE BREAKOUT STARS THAT WILL GUIDE YOUR TEAM TO THE CHAMPIONSHIP AS WELL AS POTENTIAL BUSTS WHO COULD TURN YOUR TEAM INTO THE LAUGHINGSTOCK OF THE LEAGUE.

THE BUSTS: (JUST TO BE CLEAR, I’M DEFINING A BUST AS SOMEONE WHO DOES NOT PERFORM TO THE LEVEL AT WHICH THEY WERE DRAFTED, THEY MAY STILL HAVE A DECENT SEASON)

4. TYROD TAYLOR (#12 QB)

IN HIS SINGLE SEASON AS A STARTER, THE VIRGINIA TECH GRADUATE FINISHED 16TH IN TOTAL FANTASY POINTS. AT FIRST GLANCE, THAT SEEMS RESPECTABLE. HOWEVER, WHEN YOU CONSIDER QUARTERBACKS SUCH AS ANDY DALTON, TONY ROMO, BEN ROETHLISBERGER, AND MARCUS MARIOTA MISSED SIGNIFICANT TIME DUE INJURY, A 16TH OVERALL FINISH BEGINS TO NOT SHINE SO BRIGHT. TYROD TAYLOR PLAYED A FANTASTIC YEAR OF FOOTBALL, BUT DUE TO HIS INEXPERIENCE AND INJURY-PRONE NATURE, TYROD TAYLOR PROJECTS BETTER AS A NICE BACKUP RATHER THAN A FANTASY STARTER.

3. JONATHAN STEWART (#14 RB)

LAST SEASON, JONATHAN STEWART PROFITED MASSIVELY OFF OF A TREMENDOUS YEAR FROM THE REIGNING MVP CAM NEWTON. WITH NEWTON'S DUAL THREAT NATURE(HE RAN FOR 10 TOUCHDOWNS AND PASSED FOR 35,) STEWART SAW INCREASED RUNNING ROOM, LEADING HIM TO AN EXCELLENT YEAR. WITH NEWTON PROJECTED TO COOL DOWN SLIGHTLY, THE 29 YEAR OLD STEWART, WHO FINISHED THE REGULAR SEASON INJURED, IS LIKELY TO HAVE PASSED HIS FANTASY PRIME. IN SUPER BOWL 50 LAST SEASON, STEWART, FACING THE STINGY DENVER BRONCOS DEFENSE, MANAGED JUST 29 YARDS ON 12 CARRIES. NO MATTER THE SIZE OF YOUR LEAGUE, HAVING STEWART AS AN RB1 DOES NOT BODE WELL FOR YOUR CHAMPIONSHIP HOPES.

2. ALSHON JEFFERY(#11 WR)

ACCORDING TO EX-TEAMMATE MARTELLUS BENNETT, JEFFERY HAS THE WORST QB IN ALL OF THE NFL THROWING TO HIM. WHILE THAT MAY BE A BIT OF A STRETCH, JAY CUTLER IS NOTHING TO BRAG ABOUT. UNFORTUNATELY, CUTLER IS RANKED #25 FOR QBs, A PRETTY ACCURATE POSITION IN MY OPINION. SO, THAT LEADS ME TO HIS NUMBER ONE TARGET. WHILE THE ADDITION OF A HEALTHY KEVIN WHITE SHOULD HELP THE BEARS OFFENSE SOME IN 2016, DON'T EXPECT MUCH HELP FROM JEFFERY ON YOUR FANTASY TEAM. JEFFERY HAS STRUGGLED TO STAY ON THE FIELD FOR THE PAST FEW YEARS, AND EVEN WHEN HE IS HEALTHY, HIS PRODUCTION IS FAR TOO INCONSISTENT TO BE A SOLID WR1. ALSHON JEFFERY IS ONE OF THE BIGGEST

BOOM OR BUST PLAYERS ON A WEEK-TO-WEEK BASIS, BUT HIS PRODUCTION FAR TOO OFTEN QUALIFIES AS A BUST FOR ME TO DRAFT HIM.

1. DEZ BRYANT (WR#5)

WITH A QUARTERBACK WHO COMES INTO TRAINING CAMP HEAVILY OVERWEIGHT, THE YEAR ALREADY DOES NOT LOOK GREAT FOR DEZ BRYANT AND THE 'BOYS. AFTER A STELLAR 2014 SEASON, DEZ BRYANT AND TONY ROMO WERE BOTH PLAGUED WITH INJURIES IN 2015, LEADING TO A DISMAL 4-12 RECORD AND A FOURTH PLACE NFC EAST FINISH. SEEING THAT TONY ROMO HAS NOT PLAYED A FULL 16 GAMES SINCE 2012, IT'S HARD TO IMAGINE A SCENARIO WHERE DEZ BRYANT LIVES UP TO HIS FIRST ROUND DRAFT PICK STATUS. IN FACT, IF YOU DO END UP DRAFTING BRYANT, (IF HE FALLS INTO YOUR LAP IN A LATER ROUND DEFINITELY TAKE HIM) MY BEST ADVICE WOULD BE TO PRAY FOR A ROMO INJURY. WHY? BECAUSE THE COWBOYS NEED A BACKUP QUARTERBACK, AND IF HE IS SMART, COWBOYS OWNER JERRY JONES WILL SIGN JOHNNY MANZIEL, WHO WILL LEAD THE COWBOYS TO THEIR FIRST CHAMPIONSHIP SINCE 1995.

THE SLEEPERS/SUREFIRE STARS

TODD GURLEY (#2 RB)

OKAY, SO PERHAPS THIS ONE IS CHEATING A LITTLE BIT. BUT IF HE IS THERE WHEN YOUR TURN IS UP TAKE HIM. PLAIN AND SIMPLE, NO QUESTIONS ASKED. ALTHOUGH HE MISSED THREE GAMES IN 2015, GURLEY STILL FINISHED FIFTH IN POINTS FOR A RUNNING BACK. DUE TO A TORN ACL DURING HIS SENIOR SEASON AT THE UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA, GURLEY WAS UNABLE TO PARTICIPATE IN ANY OF THE RAMS PRESEASON GAMES. YET, IN HIS FIRST NFL GAME, GURLEY RUSHED FOR 146 YARDS ON 19 CARRIES. IN HIS SOPHOMORE SEASON, GURLEY, HAVING ANSWERED THE DURABILITY QUESTIONS FROM A YEAR AGO, SHOULD BE THE NUMBER ONE OVERALL DRAFT PICK IN YOUR LEAGUE.

#3 LADARIUS GREEN (#10 TE)

THERE IS NOTHING MORE IMPORTANT TO A FANTASY TEAM THAN A STELLAR TIGHT END. ON MY CHAMPIONSHIP WINNING TEAM LAST SEASON, I

STARTED BOTH JORDAN REED AND GARY BARNIDGE. MOST LIKELY, ROB GRONKOWSKI WILL BE GONE BEFORE YOU CAN BLINK, AND JORDAN REED WILL NOT BE FAR BEHIND. SO, AS YOU REALIZED YOU HAVE DRAFTED NEARLY YOUR WHOLE TEAM YET HAVE SOMEHOW MANAGED TO FORGET THE TIGHT END FOR YET ANOTHER YEAR, HAVE NO FEAR. WHY? BECAUSE LADARIUS GREEN IS HERE. PERHAPS THE FASTEST TIGHT END IN THE NFL, GREEN HAS SPENT THE LAST THREE YEARS COMPLEMENTING THE GREAT ANTONIO GATES MASTERFULLY. AND NOW, IN HIS FOURTH YEAR, GREEN IS POISED TO BREAK OUT IN A NEW OFFENSE. INSERTED INTO AN ALREADY HIGH-POWERED OFFENSE, GREEN LOOKS TO FILL THE VOID LEFT BY HEATH MILLER.

#2 STERLING SHEPARD (#41 WR)

TO BE HONEST, THERE IS NOT MUCH RISK IN DRAFTING SHEPARD. WORSE CASE SCENARIO, YOU DRAFT HIM IN ONE OF THE FINAL ROUNDS, GIVE HIM A COUPLE WEEKS ON THE BENCH, AND THEN DROP HIM IN FAVOR OF SOMEONE ELSE. NO HARM DONE. BUT THE REWARD FAR OUTWEIGHS THE RISK. BEST CASE SCENARIO, STERLING SHEPARD BECOMES THE NUMBER TWO RECEIVER FOR THE GIANTS, RECEIVING LOTS OF TARGETS OPPOSITE ODELL BECKHAM JR. ELI MANNING, COMING OFF A CAREER YEAR, HITS STERLING SHEPARD WITH DOUBLE DIGIT TOUCHDOWNS, AND YOU WIN YOUR LEAGUE. EITHER WAY, SHEPARD WILL HAVE HIS FAIR SHARE OF TARGETS AND OPPORTUNITIES. THE GIANTS NUMBER TWO RECEIVER IS CURRENTLY VICTOR CRUZ, WHO, WHEN HEALTHY, IS A STAR. HOWEVER, CRUZ HAS NOT PLAYED A NFL GAME IN A SEASON AND A HALF. EVEN IF CRUZ DOES PLAY WELL THIS YEAR, THE GIANTS USED A THREE RECEIVER SET 91% OF THE TIME LAST SEASON, GIVING SHEPARD AMPLE CHANCES TO SHINE.

#1 JEREMY LANGFORD (#22 RB)

AS THE 22ND OVERALL RUNNING BACK, LANGFORD PROJECTS AS A MIDDLE-TIER RB2. YET LAST YEAR, IN JUST HALF A SEASON OF REASONABLE TOUCHES, LANGFORD SHINED. NOW THAT FORMER TEAMMATE MATT FORTE IS IN NEW YORK, LANGFORD GETS HIS FIRST FULL SEASON OF STARTING FOOTBALL. WHILE LANGFORD DOES CARRY SOME RISK DUE TO AN UNDERWHELMING ROOKIE SEASON, HE BOUNCED BACK FOR A STELLAR SOPHOMORE SEASON. WHILE IT MIGHT BE SMART TO HANDCUFF LANGFORD

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WITH HIS BACKUPS, EITHER KA'DEEM CAREY OR JORDAN HOWARD, LANGFORD'S POTENTIAL FAR OUTWEIGHS HIS FLAWS. AS A PROJECTED FOURTH TO FIFTH ROUND PICK, LANGFORD DOES NOT CARRY MUCH RISK, THUS MAKING HIM A GREAT VALUE PICK IN YOUR FANTASY LEAGUE.

CHANCES ARE THESE PREDICTIONS WILL BE WRONG, FOR WHAT DO I KNOW. AND SO, IF THE LIKES OF TYROD TAYLOR AND DEZ BRYANT COST YOU YOUR CHAMPIONSHIP, I GAVE YOU FAIR WARNING, SO DO NOT BLAME ME. THE POSITION RANKINGS WERE FOUND FROM MATTHEW BERRY'S ESPN FANTASY FOOTBALL POSITION RANKING.

-SAM HARRIS

[HTTP://GAMES.ESPN.COM/FPL/TOOLS/PROJECTIONS?DISPLAY=ALT&SLOTCATEGORYID=2&STARTINDEX=15](http://games.espn.com/fpl/tools/projections?display=alt&slotcategoryid=2&startindex=15)