

# **Titans Tuesday: “It was the best of times. It was the worst of times.”**

The Tennessee Titans' loss to the San Diego Chargers was a microcosm of the 2016 Titans' season. There was a lot of good. There was a little more bad. As I have said many times before, the Tennessee Titans are a team that is playing with very little margin for error. They cannot afford to make mistakes; especially not big mistakes as they did on Sunday. When the Titans play a clean game, they can beat almost any team in the league. Unfortunately, they do not seem to be capable of playing mistake-free football in consecutive games.

So, let's start with the bad.

First, three turnovers, two of which were returned for touchdowns, will lose you games in the NFL every single week. The fact that the Titans only lost by eight points is almost unbelievable. Marcus Mariota continues to confound the fans. I am on record, and will repeat it again here, that Mariota is a franchise quarterback. I believe that in a year or two, he will be a top 5 quarterback in the league. But games like this make me back away from that prediction a little. Crazy as it sounds, the interceptions do not bother me that much. The first one was a really good play by Casey Heyward. He left his man, free lanced, and undercut the throw to Delanie Walker. Mariota doesn't make that throw in a few years. He will recognize what Heyward is doing, and he will make him pay for leaving his assignment. It's good to remember that Mariota is just barely 23 years old and has only played in 21 NFL games. He is still an infant in NFL quarterback terms. He is still learning. The second interception was on Mariota and Kendall Wright. They both said as much. Wright has to run his route better there. And, he has to fight for the ball better to

prevent the interception from happening. Mariota needs to lead Wright a bit more to the sidelines.

The fumble is another story. I hate the play call. I hate running Mariota in those zone-read options. They are rarely successful. The play was doomed to fail from the beginning and Mariota's poor ball protection made it even worse. As I analyze his game right now, 21 games into his career, this is the area that concerns me the most. Your franchise quarterback cannot fumble the ball like this. Period. If Mariota cannot improve this aspect of his game, he will never reach the highs he is capable of reaching. He has to protect the ball better.

I'll bullet point the rest of the bad:

- Run defense. Worst run defense all season. It was atrocious.
- Run offense. With DeMarco Murray banged up, Derrick Henry sidelined the entire game, and the Offensive Line struggling with getting any push, the Titans' rushing attack faltered for the first time this season.
- Pass defense. Jon Robinson has a few major needs to address this offseason. The most important one in my mind is the secondary. They need a number one cornerback. Jason McCourty is good and will be an excellent number two, but if he is your best cornerback on the roster, your roster needs help. The safety position needs an upgrade as well.

---

Now, let's get to the good.

Marcus Mariota made throws that only five or six human beings on the planet can make. That is not hyperbole. The third touchdown pass he threw to Walker was one of the best throws I have seen any quarterback make. The speed, the precision, and the read were all perfect. We saw Mariota at his absolute best at times on Sunday. For the majority of the game, over 90% of

the time, he played like an All-Pro. He was making great reads. He was throwing the ball with accuracy. He was moving in the pocket better than I have seen him do for most of his career. It's scary to think how good he can become with a little more time and experience.

Rishard Matthews continues to prove that his acquisition this offseason was a smart move. He now has caught five touchdowns in the last four games. He has turned into a reliable target in the passing game.

---

I completely understand the enthusiasm for this team and how a loss like this can feel so demoralizing. I feel it too. I see this team dismantle the Dolphins and the Jaguars and I start to believe they are a good team. A playoff team. I suggest we slow down just a little. This is not a good team yet. This is an average team with the potential to be good. 2016 will be a frustrating season for fans. We will see the potential and will think that the team should be able to play like that every week. We know the Titans are in a bad division and should be fighting for the playoffs. And if the Titans don't make the playoffs and only win 6, 7, or 8 games by seasons' end, there will be many that will question the coaches and the players. Not only do I believe that would be dumb, it would also be unfair. The Titans won 5 games in the 32 games prior to this season. You can't fix that level of incompetence in one offseason. Give it time. This will be a year of ups and downs. Probably more downs. But every time this team has struggled, or Mariota has struggled, they have fought back and played much better the next series or the next game. This is a team that is learning how to be good. No doubt they need more weapons and more experience. Yet, even with a limited roster they are clearly much improved from prior seasons.

The Tennessee Titans are just good enough to be competitive in every game. They are just bad enough to lose any time they

make too many mistakes. Let's hope the good Titans show up on Sunday against the Green Bay Packers.