

Who Watches the Watchmen? (The NFL on REO)

In *Watchmen*, the genre-defining masterpiece by Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons, there is a slogan that can be seen throughout the graphic novel, spray-painted on walls, “Who watches the Watchmen?” It’s a message about keeping those in power accountable and if that is even possible. While the things I examine this week are much less important in the grand scheme, I believe they belong in the conversation. It’s too often that we find incompetence or worse coming from those that are in a place of power in the sports’ world – whether it be the leagues, the teams, or the media that covers it all. So here is my attempt to watch the watchmen.

Media Incompetence

Reading and listening to sports media is a frustrating and sometimes exasperating use of my time. I don’t think I am alone in that reaction. I get it. There will be honest, and even logical, differences of opinion. I have no problem with those. I may not like it when my favorite teams get unfairly criticized or ignored, but on some level, I understand the reasoning behind those decisions. But sometimes, or a lot of the time, sports’ writers and talkers go too far. They make absurd declarations that no intelligent person can defend. (See: EVERY WORD FROM THE LIPS OF SKIP BAYLESS.) Or sometimes, they seem to lack the simple skill of real analysis or evaluation. I’ll give you an example.

Sports Illustrated does a weekly NFL Power Rankings Poll. There are typically 17 to 18 voters and most of them have voted throughout the season. Each submits their own Power Rankings and then the totals are compiled and the Official

Power Poll is created.

In [this week's Power Rankings](#) (and last week's for that matter) my Tennessee Titans received a 30th place vote from one of the voters.

30th.

There are 32 teams in the NFL. And this person that purports to know the NFL voted the Titans as the 3rd worst team in the NFL. Look, I have no problem with the voters keeping the Titans out of the top half of the Power Rankings. They have not been a good team this year. They have been uneven and inconsistent. But even with all that, they are still 4-3, first in their division, and have wins over the Seahawks and the Jaguars – two teams that are numbers 5 and 13 respectively. The Titans' worst loss – the debacle in Houston – was to the number 11 ranked team according to the Power Ranking. They don't "show their work" on the Power Rankings so I don't know who to call out publicly but if I could I would. It's dumb and completely unsupportable.

It depends on what your definition of the word "catch" is...

Another week in the NFL, another controversial catch/no catch situation. This week's biggest offender – the Zach Miller no-catch call in the Chicago vs. New Orleans game. At this point, no one officiating an NFL game knows for sure what a catch is. For an exhaustive breakdown of some of the most controversial calls in the past few years, [go visit this link](#). It has videos and gifs and everything.

I reached out to some of my fellow REO writers Mike, Gowdy, and Mark to get their opinions on this topic. Have it fellas!

Gowdy:

For the last seven years, the NFL has massacred logic and the English language over what the meaning of a "catch" is in football. It started with Calvin Johnson vs. my Bears in 2010, reached its controversial peak in a Dallas vs. Green Bay playoff game with Dez Bryant in January of 2015 and has continued until last Sunday when Zach Miller made (what is logically and semantically) a catch vs. New Orleans in the end zone for a TD. But no, the referees ruled that it's not a catch with the NFL's Pharisee-like definition of a very simple concept.

Look, I get it to some degree. When a player bobbles the ball as he's falling to the ground, it can mean he didn't catch it in that he didn't procure it to a reasonable level, meaning he "dropped" it. I don't want to throw the baby out with the bath water and leave it all to subjectivity. But give the referees some latitude to use some common sense. Any time you over-define words and concepts, you run a huge risk of leaving out a human's ability to reason and interpret. That is exactly what has been happening in the NFL for years now. Their catch rule reads like a chapter in Leviticus. It needs to change. Because otherwise, it hurts people's brains, creates injustice (in a sports sense) and takes some fun out of the game.

Mike:

I am usually not a "things were so much better in the good old days" type person, but when it comes to catching a football in the NFL this was so much better in the good old days. I remember a time when players, coaches, refs, and fans all had the same basic understanding of what constituted a catch. Now we have to go through a checklist of questions like "Did he clearly possess the ball?" "Did he make a football move?" "Did he maintain possession all the way to the ground?" "At any point in the process of catching the football did the ball make any unnatural motion that could potentially leave an ounce of doubt in the minds of all those looking on as to the

veracity of the aforementioned completion?"

I may have made one of those questions up, but you get my point. It should not be this difficult. I am not a Dallas Cowboys fan, but if what Dez Bryant did against the Packers in the 2015 playoffs can't be ruled a catch then we need to rethink the whole thing. It hasn't really improved since then despite the tinkering. The solution, as always, fire Roger Goodell.

Mark:

What exactly is a catch according to the NFL? Ah, one the great mysteries of the cosmos. Philosophers, scientists, and theologians have debated this topic for a millennium. Verily, this is an inescapable question that every man and woman struggles with at some point in their existence. Unfortunately, those who wrestle with this question are often NFL referees. In recent years the definition of catch according to the rule book has become so convoluted that refs might need a legal degree to fully comprehend the nature of a catch. As a result we've seen legal "loopholes" exploited (occasionally at the most inopportune of times in the post season!) to deny a team/player of what should have been a catch.

I think they all make very valid points, especially the part about firing Goodell. Mike is wise. Listen to Mike. Gowdy is no slouch either using words like massacre and semantically. This is an NFL column for crying out loud! That kinda talk is too fancy for us common folk! And Mark, well Mark decided to take a more philosophical approach. Nothing wrong with that.



Is there such a thing as a bad win? Or a good loss? According to Logan Ryan, Titans' cornerback, there are not good losses or bad wins. [Ryan has a radio show on 104.5 The Zone](#) in Nashville where he sits in with the guys from [The Midday 180](#). Yesterday, Paul Kuharsky vehemently pushed back against Ryan's assertion. In Kuharsky's view, the Tennessee Titans' overtime win against the Cleveland Browns was a bad win. Ryan made a lot of good points in his response about how hard it is to win in the NFL, how some games just don't go the way you want them to and you have to do everything you can to pull out the win. That's what the Titans did against the Browns. It was an ugly win. It was a disappointing game for Titans' fans because we had hoped to see the Titans dominate from the opening whistle. But, a win is a win. I tend to side more with Logan Ryan, an actual NFL player who has won a Super Bowl, than with a sports personality/writer.

Let me frame it this way (echoing what Ryan said on the show): Would the Houston Texans' 41-38 loss to the Seattle Seahawks be considered a good loss for the Texans? Or would it be considered a bad win for the Seahawks? My guess is, most people (and Paul Kuharsky) would say that yes, it was a good loss because the Texans offense was so good in that game and it was very close. I also think that most people (including Paul) would say that it was a good win for the Seahawks. It was an exciting game, that's for sure, but does that make it a

good loss and a good win? Both teams struggled to do anything on defense. Both teams allowed their opponents to move the ball almost effortlessly down the field. (Both QB's threw 4 TDs and over 400 yards. That's a sign of very poor defense.) So why would that be a good win for the Seahawks? One side of the ball played horribly – just like the Titans offense did against the Browns. One side played really well – just like the Titans defense did against the Browns.[1. Before you lose your mind yelling at me about the quality of the opponent, know that I understand that perspective. The Browns are an awful team. The Titans should have won that game by 10+ points. I was frustrated that they didn't. But at the end of the day, they won. To me, that is all that matters. I guarantee you that while Ryan and his teammates are happy with the win, they are well aware that they have to play much better in the future. Both of those things can be true. It's not an either-or scenario like some in the media or in the fan-base want it to be.] A win is a win in the NFL. You take them any way you can get them. Assigning style points is for fans and writers and has no bearing what happens on the field and in the locker room.