

# The Forgotten History of Christian Rock: Part Four

Welcome to *The Forgotten History of Christian Rock*.

This is Part Four of a five part series exploring the history of Christian Rock and Roll Music.

To read Part One of the series focusing on the pioneers of the movement in the 1960s and 1970s click [here](#).

To read Part Two where we looked at the popular rock bands of the 1980s and early 1990s click [here](#).

To read Part Three covering the visionary bands of the 1980s and early 1990s click [here](#).

To read our intro where we explain some of the reasons we wanted to do this series click [here](#).

Thank you so much for reading please feel free to comment below.

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## Part Four:

### *The Road Less Traveled* by Michael Lytle

#### The late 90's to the early 2000's

The late 1990s and early 2000s were a pivotal time in Christian rock and roll music. While it may not have been obvious or even a conscious choice there was a battle going on for where Christian music would go in the future. On one hand, some of the more creative and critically acclaimed artists like *Jars of Clay*, *Sixpence None the Richer*, and *Switchfoot* were also the artists that were selling the most records. This

was not necessarily true in the 1980s where critical acclaim and commercial success did not always seem to go hand in hand. The rise of independent record labels like Tooth and Nail/BEC and Five Minute Walk/Sarabellum propelled forward artists like *Dimestore Prophets*, *Dryve*, *Starflyer 59*, and *Plankeye* who were blazing their own trails and not simply following what was popular in secular music. These labels also were reaching a younger audience which the big names of the 80s were starting to struggle with.

At the same time, the rise of modern pop/worship music was starting to gain momentum. If *Petra* and their 1989 album *Petra Praise: The Rock Cries Out* was the John Wycliffe of this new praise and worship music then *Delirious?* was its Martin Luther. (Under this analogy *Hillsong* would be Zwingli.) The boys from across the pond created the blueprint that is still being followed, for better or worse, to this day.

While we here at REO are certainly very much in favor of singing praises to and worshiping our creator, the focus from record labels and radio stations on "worship" music was not all positive. Lyrics that dealt with personal struggles, social issues, family dynamics, and life, in general, were quickly jettisoned in favor of songs that addressed God directly. Again, singing songs to God is not a bad thing, but we lost something along the way when other types of songs were discarded. Today we rarely, if ever, hear songs like *All Star United's* satirical *La La Land*, which took aim at the health, wealth, prosperity gospel movement. It is more difficult to find voices like Steve Hindalong of *The Choir* acknowledging the strain a cross-country move from Los Angeles to Nashville had put in his marriage in *Never More True*. We moved away from bands like *Plankeye* writing about their band breaking up and the uncertainty it created in *Goodbye*. Radio forgot artists like *The Waiting*, who drew inspiration from the opening paragraph of Melville's *Moby-Dick* to write about the Old Testament wanderings of God's chosen people in the song

*Israel.*

If you go to a Christian bookstore or listen to Christian radio today it is easy to see who won the battle. Modern worship music dominates the landscape while the more creative artists are once again going underground and using alternative methods to get their message to the public. We will continue this discussion in part five of our series.

The goal of the following playlist is to highlight some of the artists that we feel raised the bar of creativity and originality for Christian rock and roll music during the late 1990s and early 2000s. We realize that many of these artists would have cringed at being labeled a "Christian band". They would have preferred to be called a rock band that happened to be made up of people who were Christians. It may be hard to believe now, but this distinction really was a big deal to some during the time period covered in this article and playlist. While it might make for an interesting article at some point in time this is not that article. We tried to primarily highlight artists who either never got their due even at that time or who may have been popular then, but have fallen off the radar since. All songs on this playlist were released between 1994 and 2005. As always, there are other songs we would have included if they were available on Spotify. We have now put together four playlists for this series of articles. We expected the playlists that featured more recent music would be easier to put together than those featuring music from several decades ago. This was not really the case. Many great artists from the 1990s and early 2000s are not on Spotify. Some of our favorites that are missing include *Dimestore Prophets*, *The Listening*, *Reflescent Tide*, and *Room Full of Walters*.

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## Part Three:

### *The Underground Groundbreakers by Phill Lytle*

#### **The early 80's through the early 90's**

There were no platinum records. There were no arenas filled to capacity. And unless your local Christian station was unusually "out of the box", you rarely heard this music played on the radio. Yet to many, if you were to pinpoint an era of music that justifies the existence of Christian rock, this would be it. Throughout the 80's and into the early 90's, a group of singers, poets, storytellers, and artists reshaped how we experienced "Christian" music. They turned it on its

head and opened up a new world to believers, music lovers, and spiritual seekers. It was the time of the underground groundbreakers.

In part two we examined the bands that had major success and popularity during the 80's and early 90's. Bands like *Petra*, *Whiteheart*, and *DeGarmo and Key*. While those bands were playing in front of arenas full of youth groups, churches, and believers, there was another movement happening just outside of the Christian mainstream. Out there, bands like *The Call*, *Daniel Amos*, *The Prayer Chain*, and many others were singing about broken relationships, marriage problems, politics, and doubts. Out there, their songs were in turn angry and frustrated, joyous and hopeful, pointed and prophetic. The music was enigmatic – less definable. It was passionate, messy, and full-to-bursting with life. They avoided the pop rock sounds of their more accepted contemporaries, choosing instead to blaze their trails with styles and sounds all their own.

This era of music produced some of the most critically acclaimed music in the history of Christian rock. Many of the albums that released during this time frame are still considered some of the best Christian releases of all time. *Circle Slide* by *The Choir*. *Sticks and Stones* by *the 77's*. *Reconciled* by *The Call*. These and more pushed boundaries and expanded what was believed possible for "Christian" music at that time.

Their music was never easy. Whether it was Steve Taylor singing satirically about a deranged ice-cream delivery man blowing up an abortion clinic to preserve his livelihood, or *The Choir* wrestling with the grief of a miscarriage, these bands made their fans grapple with big ideas and complicated emotional reactions. In some ways, they courted controversy, not to get the spotlight as much as to shock their listeners out of their comfort and stagnation.

At every turn, it seemed like these bands could not catch their big break. In a perfect world, many of them would be household names – their music was that good. That is not to suggest that these bands did not have any influence on future generations of musicians and creators. Members of these bands went on to form successful record companies that gave Christian music one of its biggest bands in *Jars of Clay*. They went on to produce albums for much more successful bands like *Sixpence None the Richer* and *The Newsboys*. They eventually wrote and created songs that are sung in worship services all over the world like *God of Wonders*. No doubt, their musical legacy inspired many bands that are being played on the radio today. While few of them ever achieved the kind of success and recognition they deserved at the time, our musical heritage would be much poorer without their contributions.

As stated before, the playlist below is merely a selection of some of the best music in this era. It is meant to capture the sound and the spirit of this pivotal time in Christian music. Please, take some time to listen and appreciate the music that laid the groundwork and played such a monumental role in our history.

**\*\*\*Editor's Note: Part Four will be published on February 19th.\*\*\***

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# The Forgotten History of Christian Rock: Part Two

## Introduction by Michael Lytle

When scanning the FM radio dial in any U.S. city you come across a wide variety of stations. In my city, if I want to hear oldies from the 50s and 60s I have a couple options. I can also listen to classic rock from the 70s, modern rock, alternative/indie rock, top 40 pop and hip-hop, and of course a variety of country options. If I am feeling particularly adventurous, I can check out mix stations that play popular songs from the last four or five decades.

If I want to listen to Christian music I have several stations to choose from as well. Unfortunately, they all basically play the same songs over again and their entire catalog seems to be chosen from music released in the last six to twelve months. It's as if there is a deliberate attempt to pretend that Christian music did not exist before last year. There also seems to be a mandate to play a very limited number of artists who for the most part play the same generic style of pop worship music. These stations are very proud of the fact that their music is uplifting, upbeat, positive, encouraging, and safe for the whole family. Sadly, it might prove difficult to find music that is challenging, convicting, original, or thought-provoking because those qualities might alienate some of their more easily offended listeners.

Why do Christian radio stations seem to avoid anything challenging? Why do they often gravitate to easy and safe music? And more importantly, why do Christian radio stations and even Christian music listeners want to ignore their history? Regardless of whether you are a fan of the music that continues to be released in the Christian Rock or CCM genres, it is critical to recognize that there is plenty of great

Christian music that has been made over the last several decades. Unfortunately, nearly all this music has been forgotten or ignored.

We want to do our part to shed some light on this overlooked music. We decided the best way to do that is a series of short articles spotlighting different time periods and styles of Christian rock music. In [Part One](#) we covered music from the 1960s and 1970s. This article will focus on popular Christian rock of the 1980s and early 1990s. We are including a Spotify playlist that features songs from 1982-1993. This playlist is by no means exhaustive. While Spotify has a vast library of albums and songs they don't have everything we would have wanted to include.

We hope you enjoy reading these as much as we enjoyed writing them. We give you Part Two of *The Forgotten History of Christian Rock*.

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## **Part Two:**

### ***Youth Pastor Approved* by Phill Lytle**

#### **The 1980s through the early 1990s**

The hair was long and flowing. The clothes were bright and garish, with neon, pastels, and spandex making frequent appearances. The music was big and bold – loud drums, big vocals, epic guitars, and keyboard and synth liberally sprinkled in for good measure. The early days of trailblazing and rebellion were gone. The banner-bearers of creativity and boundary-pushing were operating under the radar. The music that captured and defined the zeitgeist of the Christian rock scene in the 80s was unapologetically religious and unambiguously mainstream. It was safe rock and roll yet with enough edge and bite that it retained an element of danger and



the allure of non-conformity. For the cool youth pastor, it was a dream come true.

As seen in [Part One](#), the 60s and 70s had the passionate trailblazers Larry Norman and Keith Green. In Part Three, we will talk about the underground Christian music scene with counter-cultural geniuses like The Call, The Choir, and the 77s. While those bands and many others like them were carving their paths by different means, the focal point of Christian Rock was happening out in the open for all the world to see. Bands like Petra and Stryper routinely sold out arenas that had previously been considered out of reach. Bands were selling hundreds of thousands and in some cases, even millions of records, getting serious radio airplay on traditional Christian radio stations and were no longer looked at as pariahs by the church as a whole.

And their music made clear that the union of rock and roll and Christian ministry was the formula that worked. Most of the popular bands of this generation were overtly religious, eschewing subtlety in favor of on-the-nose messaging. This is not a criticism per se, simply an observation about the fundamental truth of the bands that reached the highest popularity during this era. They proclaimed Jesus, the Bible, and the Christian faith with no fear, no hesitation, and no reservations. To some, it did not represent real life in all its ugliness and complications. But to many, this music was a lightning rod for their faith – a boisterous and encouraging reinforcement for their spiritual journey.

This era produced some of the longest-lived artists and bands in Christian music history. Degarmo and Key. Mylon and Broken Heart. White Heart. It was a time that saw Christian bands like Idle Cure and Allies continue down the path forged by the godfathers of the genre. These and many more were rock and roll enough for young people to flock to in droves, while still maintaining a sense of spiritual steadfastness that made them feel safer than anything the world had to offer.

To be clear, the bands that thrived in this era did not do so with complete acceptance by the church. There were still many that attacked and criticized the bands for their hair, their attire, and their music. They were lambasted from the pulpit by more than one nationally televised preacher.[1. Jimmy Swaggart even wrote a [book](#) about it. We are linking it for educational purposes only.] While their path was easier than the generation prior, they still did much to smooth the road for the following generations of Christian musicians. They took the slings and arrows of an unwieldy and unaccepting group of believers, and they kept on moving, creating, and performing. We do well to remember the contributions during this era. Our Church and musical heritage demand as much.

Enjoy this playlist that will serve as a quick snapshot of the sounds and the styles of the most popular Christian bands of this era. In particular, pay special attention to the musicianship and artistry at play in many of these songs – something that seems to be missing from much of the current Christian music scene. Finally, we hope you will allow one minor indulgence. We have included a couple of songs by Rich Mullins on this playlist even though we realize he does not exactly fit the profile of the bands and artists we covered in the article. We just strongly believe that his music deserves to be remembered and this playlist was the best fit.

**\*Editor's Note: Part Three will be published on February 5th.\***

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# The Forgotten History of Christian Rock: Part One

## Introduction by Michael Lytle

When scanning the FM radio dial in any U.S. city you come across a wide variety of stations. In my city, if I want to hear oldies from the 50s and 60s I have a couple options. I can also listen to classic rock from the 70s, modern rock, alternative/indie rock, top 40 pop and hip-hop, and of course a variety of country options. If I am feeling particularly adventurous, I can check out mix stations that play popular songs from the last four or five decades.

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Why do Christian radio stations avoid anything challenging? Why do they gravitate to easy and safe music? And more importantly, why do Christian radio stations and even Christian music listeners want to ignore their history? Regardless of whether you are a fan of the music that continues to be released in the Christian Rock or CCM genres, it is critical to recognize that there is plenty of great

Christian music that has been made over the last several decades. Unfortunately, nearly all this music has been forgotten or ignored.

We want to do our part to shed some light on this overlooked music. We decided the best way to do that is a series of short articles spotlighting different time periods and styles of Christian rock music. We are including a Spotify playlist with each article featuring some of the music from each era. These playlists are by no means exhaustive. While Spotify has a vast library of albums and songs they don't have everything we would have wanted to include. We hope you enjoy reading these as much as we enjoyed writing them. Without further ado, we present part one of The Forgotten History of Christian Rock.

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## **Part One:**

***Why Should the Devil Have All the Good Music?* by David Lytle**

### **The 1960s through late 1970s**

Rock 'n' Roll was rebellion—rebellion from social conformity, rebellion from moral standards, rebellion from the church. Sure artists like Elvis Presley, Jerry Lee Lewis, and Chuck Berry infused blues with the sounds of both black and southern gospel, but the outcome was far from the music of the sanctuary. It was the music of the night and the nightclub. As the rebels of the 1950s gave way to the hippies of the 1960s, this rebellion became increasingly clear.

Rock 'n' Roll was sinful. Both the church and the artist agreed. It was rhythmic, sexual, and broke every tradition. Teens gyrated and shouted, while fundamentalist preachers fumed. When John Lennon contrasted the popularity of the Beatles with that of Jesus he did more than make an observation—he drew battle lines. It's no surprise that this same man later found it so easy to imagine a world where there

is no heaven. It was a world Christians found unimaginable.

More importantly, Rock 'n' Roll was the soul of a generation. What a generation it was! Their parents had grown up during the Great Depression and sacrificed mental and physical health to defeat the war machines of Germany and Japan. They were coming of age in the suburbs that sprouted in the soil of this post-war economic boom. The older the baby boomers got the more it became clear that they were not their parents. Their music, more than anything, was what made them different.

In this context, a handful of young people experimented with the idea of Rock 'n' Roll that was about Jesus. This first generation of Christian rockers faced a serious dilemma—the dilemma of existence. How could rock music even be Christian? How could a Christian play rock? For most churches, it was easy to dismiss rock as sinful, but there was a minority who understood that Rock n' Roll was the heart language of the new generation. They understood that rebellion from some of their parents' values (namely materialism and racial segregation) could be virtuous. They understood that Jesus transcended cultural expression. They were the Jesus Movement.

Some have tried to locate the origin of the movement to one church, like Chuck Smith's Calvary Chapel in Costa Mesa, CA, or one artist, like Larry Norman. Yet, the origins of Jesus Rock, like the origins of Rock 'n' Roll, are much more difficult to pin down. All over the Country musicians were melding the message of Jesus with the music of the times. Although a minority, churches in various parts of the country encouraged Christians to redeem Rock 'n' Roll. Likewise, many artists would forsake a lifestyle of sexual promiscuity and drugs for a radical relationship with Jesus Christ. They were known as Jesus Freaks. Their movement: the Jesus Movement. Their music: Jesus Music. Elton John even sang about them. They were Christian Hippies. Their message was about salvation, but their music would still rock.

Well, it would sort of rock. The fact remains that much of the Christian Rock music of the 1960s was never recorded. Recording costs were prohibitive and quality was low. Low quality was especially a problem for the heavier music of the late 60s. No matter, folk music was where it was at anyway. This was the era of Bob Dylan, Neil Young, and David Crosby. Much of the memorable Christian Rock from this era reflects these influences. Love Song, Sweet Comfort Band, 2nd Chapter of Acts, Randy Stonehill, and Larry Norman are just a few examples.

Speaking of Larry Norman. Norman is to Christian Rock what Elvis Presley is to Rock n' Roll. He wasn't the first but it is impossible to tell the story without him. He, more than anyone, is associated with the origins of Christian rock. His "Why should the Devil Have All the Good Music?" attempted to reconcile the dilemma of Christianity and Rock. His "Sweet Song of Salvation" became the anthem of the Jesus Movement and his "Great American Novel" is a scathing challenge to American values in the age of the space race in the tradition of Bob Dylan.

By the mid-1970s folk-based Christian music was well established and even accepted in some circles. Rock n' Roll, however, had gotten edgier. It was time for Christian Rock to really rock. It was time for Petra and the Resurrection Band. These bands attempted to preach the gospel with the blues-rock of the Rolling Stones and Led Zeppelin. Both had remarkably long careers and while their styles changed with the times, they consistently made their music about the gospel of Jesus. Petra would go on to make their name synonymous with Christian Rock throughout the 80s and 90s. They would also continue to rock.

The first generation of Christian Rockers faced opposition from all angles. They were scorned by the mainstream because of their commitment to Jesus and their denunciation of drugs and illicit sex. They were rebuked by much of the Church for

even trying to redeem the music of the world. Still, they kept on message. They focused mostly on salvation and the change brought by Jesus. As can be seen in the playlist, there also seems to be a significant interest in eschatology, which was apparently brought about by the fear of the atomic bomb.

The desire to redeem Rock n' Roll made it necessary to create a musical subgenre in which the lyrics set Christian Rock apart from "secular." While this created a false dichotomy between the sacred and the secular that Christian artists still face today, their singular focus on Jesus made their movement a success. Thousands came to a saving faith through the Jesus Movement. Today the instruments and rhythms of Rock can be heard in the majority of churches across the country.

This is most certainly an epoch on the history of the Christian church worth noting. For those Christians who enjoy rock music, this is your story. We hope you enjoy this less-than-exhaustive playlist. Sadly, due to the age of these recordings, and other issues, many great songs and artists are not available on Spotify. We did the best we could with what we had available. Please, seek out these trailblazing artists and bands we highlighted above. We also hope you leave your comments and share this series of articles. Let's not forget our past.

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# Wild Card Round Preview (The NFL on REO)

## Tennessee at Kansas City

The Tennessee Titans are big underdogs in the Wild Card match up with the Kansas City Chiefs. This is not surprising. The Titans are without their starting running back, they have played poorly on offense for most of the season, and they are short on playoff experience. The Chiefs, on the other hand, have an explosive offense, a very successful head coach, and are playing at home. Even as a Titans fan I admit that it makes sense that the Chiefs are a 9 point favorite.

Maybe it is the homer in me, but I expect this game to be close. The Chiefs have not won a home playoff game since 1993. This will be their sixth try and my sources are telling me their fans are nervous. On the Titans side QB Marcus Mariota is looking healthier than he has most of this season. In their playoff clinching victory last week he ran the ball several times with a good amount of success. Something he has not done most of this season due to injury. The Titans defense has also played well, especially against the run, in the majority of games this season.

The Chiefs are a streaky team. They started off 5-0 and looked to be the best team in the NFL. They went into a 1-6 tailspin and appeared to be choking away their playoff spot. Then they



rebounded and finished 4-0 to win their division and get a home game in the playoffs. Unfortunately for the Titans they Chiefs are on a hot streak right now and should win a tightly contested game. Final score prediction – KC over TN 24-20.

– Mike Lytle

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### **Atlanta at Los Angeles (Rams)**

Last year at this time we would have all been surprised to find that the LA Rams were even in the playoffs. The fact is, they are not only in the playoffs, but are expected to beat the reigning-NFC-champion Falcons by a touchdown. The new-in-town Rams have taken the NFL by storm and are trying to recreate the greatest show on turf. The Rams offense has been able to put up over 30 points in 8 games this year and over 25 points in 12 games. They average a league-high 29.9 points per game. They are a well-balanced offense that has only failed to execute a handful of time. Jared Golf has proven to be a quality quarterback and as long as Todd Gurley gets plenty of touches, the Rams should be able to put up points on Atlanta. Their defense, for the most part, has gotten the job done. With defensive genius Wade Phillips calling the shots, there is reason to have confidence that they can keep the Rams in the game.

Despite being the underdogs, I am picking the Falcons to win this game. The Falcons struggled early in the year, but they seemed to turn it around starting with week 10 against the cowboys. They have only lost two games since that time and both to strong teams. When push comes to shove, I have more confidence in Matt Ryan than Jared Golf. Ryan's experience in the playoffs will be invaluable in picking apart the Wade Phillips' defense. Perhaps more importantly, I trust Julio Jones to make big catches for his team. Sure, he has struggled to find the end zone this season, but big players live for big

games. Julio was made for this moment.

Regardless of who wins, I expect this one to be a shootout. Falcons over Rams 35-30.

– David Lytle

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## **Buffalo at Jacksonville**

The Buffalo Bills enter the playoffs as the darlings of the NFL. For this storied franchise, it has been a long time (1999 season) since they have played postseason football, and it took a number of seemingly miraculous things to happen for them to finally break through this season. It is a great story and while I am happy for the team and their fans, great stories do not equal great teams, and the Bills are not a great team. They were a bottom half of the league team in both offensive and defensive statistics. They don't do any one thing really well, and do most things just good enough to get by. And LeSean McCoy being less than 100% is a back breaker.

On the other side, the Jacksonville Jaguars have been objectively good this season. They are one of the top two defenses in the league by any measurements that matter. And not to be outdone, they are the number five scoring team in the league. Their weaknesses are inexperience and Blake Bortles. While Bortles has been mostly solid this season, is there anyone out there that has any real confidence that Bad Bortles won't rear its ugly head at a critical moment?

Bortles will Bortle, the Bills are average, but the unit with the most talent on the field, the Jags defense, will dominate. Jags 30 Bills 10.

– Phill Lytle

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## **Carolina at New Orleans**

In my humble opinion this is the most crucial game of the weekend. Simply because a strong case can be made for the winner being the NFC favorite even if they will not have home field. Many people would look at Philly, Minnesota and the L.A. Rams and point to either struggles or playoff inexperience at QB as cause for concern. As is well documented on REO by now, not me. I have less faith in the Top 3 NFC seeds mainly because none of them have won a playoff game literally since George W. Bush lived at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue.

That is not the case for the Panthers and Saints. On the road side you have a team that just went to the Super Bowl two years ago and were steamrolled by one of the more impressive defensive efforts by Denver we have ever seen in a game that significant. Carolina isn't as good an offense as their Super Bowl year but they do have Christian McCaffrey now, and Cam Newton still plays with a swagger that belies his less-than-elite stats and it makes a difference.

On the home side, you have a team with a very unique weapon in former-SEC two-headed monster RB Mark Alvin Ingram Kamara (combined 1850 yards rushing, 139 receptions and 25 total TDs). And also for only the third time in Drew Brees' 12 years with the franchise, the defense finished in the Top 10 in fewest points given up. It's uncanny how Brees has played with a Top 13 defense by this criteria five times in New Orleans and has made the playoffs every time and has played with a 25th or worse defense by this criteria six times and missed the playoffs every time. The one exception to this trend was the year NO won the Super Bowl with the 20th ranked defense.

In addition to being at home, I give New Orleans the advantage because of Brees. He has exceptional playoff stats in his

career (320 YPG, a 4:1 TD:Int ratio) and has lost numerous times because his D could not get a stop, most notoriously against San Francisco in 2011 when he led them to 18 fourth quarter points and still lost (Let it be noted that Drew Brees has far and away the most 4th TD passes in NFL history to give his team the lead in a game his teams would lose, nearly twice as many as the #2 guy). Their D is nowhere close to Denver in 2015 or even Minnesota this year, but they will be good enough to help New Orleans win this game and probably at least two more. I'll say New Orleans 31, Carolina 20.

– Gowdy Cannon

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# **The NFL and the Myth of Parity (The NFL on REO)**

**The NFL and the Myth of Parity**

**by Mike Lytle**

It is pretty much universally accepted that the NFL wants parity around the league. In 1992 the league introduced unrestricted free agency which gave every team access to the same pool of players. In 1994 a league wide salary cap was adopted which meant that every team had the exact same limit on what they could spend on players. No matter how deep the owner's pockets were or how much money the team generated from their fans the playing field was, at least theoretically, level. I don't dispute these facts and I completely agree that

the NFL wants every team to have a chance to compete for a Super Bowl. This is not like college football where teams like Alabama and Ohio State are simply more talented than just about every team they play and should compete for a title just about every year. While teams like Indiana and Vanderbilt will be lucky to post a winning record once every five years.

Anyone who follows the league knows that on average there are six new playoff teams each year (out of twelve) and that each fall just about every fan base feels like their team has a chance to do something special if things break right for them. It is one of the reasons that despite negative publicity and a recent drop in the ratings the NFL is still the highest rated sport in our country by a pretty wide margin.

If we left it at that I think we would all agree that there is parity in the NFL and most would agree that that is a good thing. Unfortunately many fans and even respected sports media members want to take it further. Just about every year, especially if a dominant team does not establish themselves early in the season, you will hear a chorus of complaints. They say things like "the NFL wants every team to finish 8-8" or "there are no good teams this year, everyone is somewhere between bad or mediocre".

I want to be clear that this is a ridiculous position that is not supported by any of the evidence we have at our disposal. Each and every year there are great teams. Each and every year there are terrible teams. The league will never have anything close to a bunch of middle of the pack teams. It just won't happen. Unlike the NBA or college football we might not know who the great or terrible teams will be before the season starts, but rest assured they will emerge every season.

Let's look at the numbers. I decided to go back to the year 2000 partially because it is a nice round number and partially because the cries of "too much parity" started in the late 90s when the salary cap had crippled previous dynasties like the

49ers and the Cowboys. If the NFL is really a race to the middle like some say we would expect to see very few, if any, really great teams and very few, if any, really bad teams from year to year.

I (arbitrarily!) decided that the mark of a very good/great team should be 13 wins. A 13-3 record is an 81.25 winning percentage. If you are going up against highly paid professionals each week and can win over 80% of the time then you are doing something right. Since the year 2000 there has been at least one 13 win (or better) team each season except for two. In 2002 there were three 12 win teams, but nobody reached 13 or more. In 2014 there were four 12 win teams.

On the flip side, if you are winning three or fewer games in a season then you just aren't very good. Since 2000 there has been only one season when at least one team did not finish with 3-13 or worse. That season 4-12 was the worst record in the league.

What do these numbers tell us? The main lesson is that virtually every year there are great teams in the NFL that win over 80% of their games. Most of the time there are a few teams like this per season. There are also really terrible teams in the league virtually every season that win less than 20% of their games.

The second lesson is to ignore sports radio and TV personalities who need to fill several hours each week. They fall to the temptation of overstating things. Fans do this as well, but at least they are not getting paid for their terrible opinions. This season when the Patriots and Steelers started more slowly than expected and no dominant team was emerging early in the season I heard the cries. I knew they would be proven wrong and sure enough the Patriots and Steelers are both 9-2 and on pace to win 13 games each. The Eagles are even better as they are on pace to go 14-2. On the other end of the spectrum the Browns are 0-11 and the 49ers

are 1-10. So much for parity.

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## REO Top Ten: Pies

Thanksgiving may primarily be about a heart attitude, but is there any image we associate more with the day than food? And is there any food other than turkey that we think about more than dessert? And is there any dessert we love more at Thanksgiving than pie?

With that in mind, REO had another round of voting with abrasive arguments, snide comments and manhood questioning. All over pie. Here are the ten that came out on top, in reverse order:

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### 10. Apple Pie



Gowdy and I had a hard fought battle over who would write a

tribute to the goodly apple pie. In the end, I slew him with my gleaming scimitar and then ate some apple pie. Kidding. I didn't slay him and I haven't had apple pie in some time.

I have never made an apple pie, but I have had the honor and privilege of being on the receiving end of masters of the art of apple pie cookery. In my mind, there are few pies as American as apple pie. Maybe pumpkin, pecan, or cherry. For my money, though, apple pie beats out these worthy opponents as far as U.S. citizenship. The apple pie can be deserved in a variety of different and very delicious ways. I have personally had so many superb types and styles that it is difficult to say an apple pie absolutely has to be in such and such a way to be a work of art. Two things, however, I do consider crucial in all varieties of apple pie: 1) A good, substantial crust and 2) a side helping of vanilla ice cream. This second is an extremely important issue. There is no adequate substitute. Anything else is uncivilized and un-American. (Ben Plunkett)

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## **9. Key Lime Pie**





I will be the first to admit that Key Lime pie is not for everyone. Unfortunately, all great people and even great foods have their detractors. After all, many are called, but few are chosen. If you like a bit of sour with all that sweet then this is the dessert for you. That delicious graham cracker crust puts it over the top. If Key Lime pie is wrong then I don't want to be right. (Mike Lytle)

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## **8. Cherry Pie**



Maybe apple pie is more “all American” but cherry pie tastes so much better that it should be the pie that represents our great nation in all international pie competitions. Nothing says THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA better than a homemade cherry pie with lattice crust cooling on the window sill of a little house out in the country. Topped with vanilla ice cream or even whipped cream cherry pie never disappoints. The awful 80s rock band Warrant named a terrible song (and album) after this great dessert but even that travesty could not ruin it for me. My only regret is that I did not fight harder to move this higher up on our list. (Mike Lytle)

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## 7. Snickers Pie



Snickers won our best candy bracket so the built-in taste of Snickers in anything is going to be gold. I didn't grow up with it in pie form so for the last few years I have had to make up for decades of no Snickers pie. I often look for Snickers flavored anything when going to a place that offers deserts and I am often rewarded. So putting the best candy with one of the best forms of a dessert is a can't miss. And it didn't miss, landing in our Top Ten. (Gowdy Cannon)

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## 6. Cheesecake



Back in 2016 I did a March Madness bracket on best dessert and cheesecake won. By a landslide. It dominated the field like the '98 Yankees. The final score of the championship was 74-43. It was like watching Reagan vs. Mondale.

I heartily concurred with the result. Candy excluded, I don't know that there is anything I enjoy more for the old sweet tooth than a well-done cheesecake. Having Eli's and the Cheesecake Factory close to my Chicago address is sublime. Heck, I'll even take the \$8.99 version from Aldi. Cheesecake is that good.

True story: one of my friends that used to live in Chicago wept the first time she saw a cheesecake at Eli's. Literally cried. I mean real tears, streaming down the face as if watching the *Friends* episode where Ross and Rachel break up. What more can you say for this dessert? (Gowdy Cannon)

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## 5. Peanut Butter Pie



I've always enjoyed Peanut Butter pie. I'm a big fan of pie and of peanut butter, so the combination of the two is right in my wheelhouse. That said, a few years ago, I was at my mother's house and she had baked a pie earlier that day from a new recipe. It was a peanut butter pie with around half the sugar as the typical peanut butter pie. My mom is a great cook but I doubted that a pie with half the sugar would be something I would enjoy. I also was pretty confident it was another of my mother's attempts to help me to do something about some of my baby fat that had proven dreadfully difficult to get rid of. [1. Side note: When baby fat hangs around for nearly 40 years, can we honestly still call it baby fat? I contend that's a bit of a gray area.] My love of pie overruled my suspicion of my mother's true motives and I ate the pie. After two pieces, I pushed away from the table with complete confidence that it was the best peanut butter pie I had ever tasted. (Phill Lytle)

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## 4. Fudge



We were unable to find a volunteer to write the blurb for Fudge Pie, even though it finished in our top five. So, in place of another well-written, witty, and intelligent blurb, we are going to peel back the curtain and let you see how the sausage is made at RE0. Here is a sampling of our discussion about who should write the blurb:

**Mike Lytle:** *I like fudge pie alright but not enough to write a blurb for it. Who was pushing it during the bracket?*

**Ben Plunkett:** *Good question. I don't even remember ever eating it.*

**Phill Lytle:** *Fudge beat out:*

*Banana Cream (1st round)*

*Strawberry (2nd round)*

*Peanut Butter (3rd round)*

*It lost to Pecan in the Final Four.*

*I'm pretty sure I voted for it in the first two rounds as I don't like those other pies. I know I voted for Peanut Butter over it. (I was the only one evidently as PB lost 1-5 against Fudge in the elite 8.)*

**Ben Plunkett:** *What in the world was I thinking? Not only haven't I tried Fudge Pie, I love Peanut Butter Pie.*

after a few minutes of doing a bit more research on how the vote went down...

**Phill Lytle:** *I was wrong. I voted for Fudge. I know why. At that time, I hadn't tasted my mom's Peanut Butter pie – which is far superior to any Fudge pie I have ever had. Ben, you voted for PB over fudge. You were the lone PB supporter.*

**Nathan Patton:** *FWIW (I don't know if it's already been mentioned, but I'm too lazy to check) today is National Peanut Butter Fudge Day... also National Absurdity Day, though that's not as relevant... though maybe it is...*

And there's your blurb for Fudge Pie.

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### 3. Chess Pie



Chess pie is above all the tired and mealy-mouthed protestations made by foodies, elitists, and health conscious. They decry its simplicity. They denounce its unashamed reliance on ingredients we have been told are no longer acceptable to a refined and mature palate. Chess pie hears their high-pitched, meddlesome squawking and rises above the fray. Chess pie hears the noise and responds with silence. Chess pie is itself the answer. Before its face questions die away. What other answer would suffice?

Check mate. (Phill Lytle)

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## 2. Pumpkin Pie





This remains by far my favorite kind of pie. My love affair with this slice of lusciousness began with my mom's masterpieces. These have yet to be beat in mine eyes. However, (and this an incredibly strong "however.") there is something about any pumpkin pie when capably done that earns it this elite place on our list. That flawless blend of pumpkin and spices. That sweet, sweet ooze in the mouth. That harnessing in pie form of the fall and Thanksgiving spirit. Perfection. (Ben Plunkett)

## **1. Pecan Pie**



A great pecan pie can be difficult to make. Actually, I don't know this to be true from first-hand experience. I've learned it's best to only be involved in the of eating of pies and not the process of making pies. Which is fortunate for me because I get to reap the delicious rewards from excellent bakers like my wife and mother. It's also fortunate for the world because they are not subjected to my pitiful culinary creations. Some of my baking attempts ended up as twisted monstrosities. I've yet to see masses brandishing pitchforks and torches gathered outside my house, though the sight wouldn't surprise me. But I digress! My taste buds tell me that not all pies are created equal. Some varieties are better than others. And even among a specific variety like pecan, some turn out superior to others. They also inform me that when a pecan pie has just the right balance of taste, consistency, and sweetness then it's the pie which all others look up to in envy! Like so many things in life balance is the key. "I am one with the Pie and the Pie is with me." "May the Pie be with you... always." (Mark Sass)

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# Rambling Ever On Presents: Overrated/Underrated

We're back with more infallible opinions on those things in our culture that are a little too respected and things that need more love.

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**Ben Plunkett**

## **Overrated – Big Toe**

Everyone thinks he's the cool guy on the foot campus because he's this big old Hoss fella and he's the only piggy that actually does any work by going to market. All that is well and good, but he is also the only piggy that gets hurt. You ever think about that? So you're getting up in the middle of the night. Nine times out of ten, you are going to stub a toe and every single one of those times it the big toe and his bulbous ways.

## **Underrated – Pinky Toe**

This is the dude that went wee, wee, wee all the way home. Okay, that does seem pretty lame, but people aren't asking about the context. It's all because all the other toes are so mean and stuff. So really, it all comes down to his sorry family life: His miserable brothers. There's the hifalutin biggest brother, the second eldest who stays at home all day playing video games, the third oldest who always eats all the food, and the pretentious fourth brother who constantly preaches on the many excellences of veganism. All in all, the poor guy has sorry role models and therefore has good reason to wee, wee, wee all time. Bless his heart.

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## Mike Lytle

**Overrated** – [Funyuns](#). I am not a fan of these artificial, processed, disgusting things that are made to look like the letter “o”. They are a disgrace to the chip family as well as the onion ring family. It is really hard to bring shame to two different types of food, but Funyuns pull it off easily. The fact that the word “fun” is in their name when they are opposite of fun is the cherry on top of this failure sundae. When most of your main ingredients sound like the names of villains in Harry Potter[2. Ferrous Sulfate would be exhibit A] then you have a problem.

**Underrated** – **Pork Rinds**. NOW WE ARE TALKING! Sorry about yelling, but I get excited about frying pork skin. They are natural, they are low in carbs, they are a great source of protein, but most importantly they are delicious. Whether you prefer plain, bbq, or hot and spicy, there is a pork rind for you. They are great served fresh at a state or county fair, but they are also great in a bag from your local Walmart or gas station convenience store. Sure they are high in sodium and fat, but most of us need more sodium and fat in our diet anyway so that is not necessarily a negative[3. This is completely false as most of us do NOT need more fat or sodium in our diets.]. In Spanish, they are called chicharrones which makes them sound even more scrumptious.

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## Gowdy Cannon

**Overrated: Deep Dish Pizza from anywhere**

**Underrated: Frozen \$2.29 Pizza from [Aldi](#)**

Oh, do I get made fun of for this in my church in Chicago. But I must keep it <sup>100</sup> since the movie *Creed* taught me to. For pizza, I prefer a balance of ingredients. Deep dish has far too much sauce, which I assume is the point. The tomato sauce

is a role player on a good pizza to me, not the Allen Iverson of tastes. Hogging the ball.

I can, and have, eaten the big frozen Aldi pizzas five times in a week. They are simple yet thoroughly satisfying. I still remember when they raised the price from \$1.99 to \$2.29 at my local store. I wept for days. Because 30 cents over thousands of pizzas really adds up.

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## **Phill Lytle**

### **Overrated: Candy Corn**

In 2016, [USA Today](#) conducted a survey to determine the favorite candy for each state. The people of the great state of Tennessee, my state, picked Candy Corn as their favorite.

Candy Corn.

I don't want to speak ill of my state, but this might be the dumbest thing Tennessee has ever done. Candy Corn is vile. It is a disgrace to candy. It is a disgrace to corn. It is sickly-sweet with the consistency and texture of hardened ear wax.

### **Underrated: Corn**

Corn is the most underrated of all vegetables[1. I realize there is a lot of debate on this point. Some consider corn a vegetable, a fruit, and a grain. Basically, it's the holy trinity of food.]. It is versatile: you can put corn in just about anything and it makes that dish better. Corn on the cob – particularly grilled corn on the cob – is about the tastiest thing in the world. Other great examples of corn usage: Corn Casserole. Cornbread. Corn tortillas. Corn chowder. Cornhole!!!

Corn is king.

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## **Ben Plunkett**

### **Overrated – White Coffee (Overcreamed coffee)**

This is what I call cups of creamer/milk with a little bit of coffee added. A lot of people apparently consider this the greatest thing since the invention of goat yoga. I have no problem with milk. I love milk. Milk is good people. But when I drink milk, I drink milk. When I drink coffee, I drink coffee. A wise coffee drinker once told me that you should never trust coffee drinkers who corrupt their coffee. I think there might be something to that.

### **Underrated – Black Coffee**

And that brings me to the underrated king of coffees. It ain't just me, folks. There are dozens of us! Dozens! I'm thinking about starting a Black Coffee Matters movement. I think such a group has potential to make a true difference in the Java world. Who's with me?!

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## **Phill Lytle**

### **Overrated: Sleeping in**

Sleeping in was fun when I was 13. Sleeping in stopped being fun when I became a man. Sleeping in is painful now that I am nearly 40. If I sleep in (basically any time after 9:00 AM) I feel like death the rest of the day. Plus, I feel like I wasted a good portion of my day.

### **Underrated: Naps**

Naps were awful when I was a kid. Naps were essential when I was in college. Naps are glorious retreats to the world of slumber now that I am nearly 40! As much as it drives my wife crazy, I am able to take a nap every day at work on my lunch break. As a teacher, she is unable to do that, and so she resents my happiness and sleep.[1. She doesn't resent it. That

was a joke. Or maybe she does resent it a little. I don't know. I'm too relaxed and rested to really notice or care...due to all the naps.]

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### **Mike Lytle**

**Overrated – Day old sushi.** I am going to get very personal with this one. I once ate day old sushi that I purchased at a grocery store. I ate half of it the day I bought it and it was fine. I ate the other half the next day and it was not fine. Or perhaps I should say I was not fine. I have a pretty impressive record of stomach issues during my lifetime. This was especially true when I was younger. The sushi I ate that day messed me up for over a month. Most every topic covered in this article is a matter of personal opinion, but this one is fact – DON'T EAT DAY OLD SUSHI!

**Underrated – Day old chili.** I love fresh chili. I have had the honor and privilege of being judge/scorekeeper for several chili cook-offs and have tasted hundreds of chili varieties that were entered for competition. I have savored every moment. That being said, there is just something about eating chili the day after (or even a couple days after) it was first prepared. The flavors have more time to coalesce. The spices and seasonings have much needed time to meld with all the other ingredients and produce something truly special. Take your time, don't rush...you will thank me later.

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### **Gowdy Cannon**

**Overrated: Pronouncing 'gif' with a Hard G**

**Underrated: Pronouncing 'gif' with a Soft G**

“Gift” is an exception to an English pronunciation rule. “Giraffe” is the rule. I’m not even going to argue this. As a Level 1 ESL teacher I already spend way too much time trying to explain why OU has six pronunciations, why “both” and “bother” have completely different O and TH sounds and why “February” and “Wednesday” have the most random, ridiculous silent Rs and Ds (and if you think about it, the second E in Wednesday is silent as well...you can’t make this stuff up). All words we add henceforth need to be consistent. Think of the children! (And the immigrants)

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## **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.



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## 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.

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## **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 Goddell.

**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.

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## Titans Talk



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.

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## **Five Predictions For the 2017-18 NBA Season**

The NBA regular season tipped off last week. The NBA has become a sport where the offseason gets more attention than the regular season. With all the blockbuster trades and huge free-agent signings, it is not hard to see why this is the case. Now we get to see how all those offseason moves will pan out. Last season I made five predictions about the NBA and somehow all five ended up happening. I was on cloud nine. My head grew to twice its normal size, I was invincible. I even considered flying to Vegas to put my skills to the test.

Thankfully the Vegas trip never happened. I contented myself instead, by making five NFL predictions for this current season. A couple of those NFL predictions aren't looking so good this point and I have come crashing back down to earth. Apparently, I do not have the gift of prophecy.

Despite my recent failures I have decided to dust myself off and try again. What follows are five predictions for the 2017-2018 NBA season. Maybe I can recapture the magic from last year.

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**LeBron James will win the league MVP award.** I think this will happen for a couple reasons. First, there seems to be a growing sentiment among sports media members that LeBron should win again. He has won the award four times, but his last MVP trophy was in 2013. He is still considered the best player in the world so many find it odd that he has not won this award in four years.[1. I would counter that the guys who have won the last four MVPs each deserved them.] The second reason I think LeBron will win is more practical. No matter how good Golden State is Steph Curry and Kevin Durant will take votes from each other. Russell Westbrook won last year, but his Thunder team added two all-star players so while the team should be better his numbers will almost certainly go down. The same can be said for last year's runner-up James Harden after the Rockets added a future hall of famer in Chris Paul. Other contenders may emerge, but, if he stays healthy, LeBron's team should win plenty of games and his numbers should be MVP worthy.

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**The Milwaukee Bucks will win a playoff series.** Their last series win was in 2001 so it's been a while. That is all about to change though. With Giannis Antetokounmpo[2. AKA The Greek Freak] they have a top ten player in the league. He may be a top-five player after this season. He should be a household name already, but his name is so hard to say and spell it has held him back.[3. If his name was John Smith and he played for the Knicks or Lakers you would be sick of hearing about him at this point.] He led the team in every major statistical category last season as a 22-year-old. The sky is the limit with this guy and they have built a decent team around him especially if Jabari Parker can come back from injury and regains his previous form. I expect 45-50 wins and a victory in the first round of the playoffs.

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**The Golden State Warriors will win 70 games this season.** Only two teams in history have ever won 70 or more games in a season so to expect that out of the gate is a tall order. With the talent they have and the chemistry built by years of playing together 70 wins a real possibility. I don't think they will chase it like they did two seasons ago when they set the win record at 73, but it is hard to see them losing a lot this season.

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**Fewer players will sit out games due to rest this season.** Despite criticism from some[4. Charles Barkley has apparently reached the stage in life where he complains about everything. Even decisions that make perfect sense. As a long time fan of his, all I can say is "You are better than that Charles!"] the league made a wise decision to spread the regular season out a bit. They are scheduling fewer games on consecutive nights and trying to avoid the dreaded four games in five nights stretches. This should mean coaches won't rest guys as often and it will be more likely that paying fans will get to see teams at full strength. If this works it is a win-win for everyone.

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**People will still complain when players do rest.** I get the complaints, I really do. If someone pays the full price of a ticket only to find out that many of the players they came to see are not playing that can be a real bummer. At the same time, I totally understand why coaches rest players.[5. I find it interesting that in baseball it is a completely accepted part of the sport that players will sit out games to rest during the season, but when NBA teams started doing the same thing it signaled the rapid decline of Western civilization.] Up until about two years ago, the only team that routinely



rested healthy players was the San Antonio Spurs. The Spurs also happen to be the most successful NBA franchise of the past two decades winning five championships and being a legitimate contender every year since 1997-1998. It is not a surprise that other teams started copying their techniques and strategies. Even with the schedule changes, this issue won't go away. Coaches will rest guys during the regular season in preparation for the playoffs and sports talk show hosts and fans will complain.

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There you have it. I would love to get your feedback on these predictions and hear what others think may happen this season.