

The Blame Game (The NFL on REO)

Titans Talk



Sunday's game in Miami was brutal to watch. The Titans were never able to find any offensive rhythm under backup QB, Matt Cassel. It is no surprise, that after a 16-10 loss to a painfully bad Miami Dolphins' team, many people in the Titans' organization are getting blamed. And there is plenty of well-deserved blame to go around. Unfortunately, most of the local writers, radio talkers, and fans are pointing their fingers in the wrong direction. That is where I come in. Consider this the official Blame Index for the debacle in South Florida.

Officials: 50% of the blame.

I am not a "blame the refs" kind of guy. I will complain about the refs. I will criticize the refs. I will yell at the refs. But in almost every game, the refs do not ultimately decide the outcome. There are always plays that can be made to overcome bad officiating. But what we witnessed in Miami was so awful and so game-changing, that it has to be number one on this list. There were multiple examples of incompetence throughout the game, but the sequence late in the 1st quarter

proved to be the most damaging so we will focus on that.

With less than a minute left in the 1st quarter, down 0-3, Matt Cassel did something no one watching that game thought he could do: He completed a pass more than 10 yards down the field. In fact, he threw a decent ball down the field to Delanie Walker for a 59-yard touchdown. Titans' fans celebrated. Then we saw the flag. As all fans of the Tennessee Titans know, you don't cheer for the team until you are completely sure there is no flag on the field. (On a personal note, my oldest son will wait a minute or two before he celebrates because he is convinced that the refs will never allow anything good to happen to the Titans. Thanks for killing my son's spirit NFL.) We waited for the call from the officials...and were rewarded with one of the most spectacularly wrong-headed penalties in the history of the game. Pass interference on Jonnu Smith, rookie Tight End of the Titans. "That doesn't seem like that bad of a call," you say. "If he interfered with the defender, perhaps that is how Walker got open." If only it were that simple. No, Smith and his defender (the defender who initiated contact by the way) were TWENTY yards away from the catch. (Watch the play [here](#).) There was less contact, less hand-checking than in virtually every pass play in every game in the NFL this season. That's only a slight exaggeration. It was minor contact, by both players, that literally had nothing to do with anything that happened on that touchdown pass and catch. But the officials think that everyone watches NFL games to see them throw flags and awkwardly talk to the crowd so...

It was a bad call. But it was a back-breaking call for the Titans in this game because that one play could have been the very play that allowed them to get the offense on track. I'll explain.

Up until that point in the game, and throughout the rest of the game, the Titans struggled to do much on offense. With Cassel as your QB, your options are limited at best. The Miami

defense did not respect the Titans' passing game and with good reason. So, they were stacking the box, daring the Titans to throw. If that TD to Walker stands, the entire defensive strategy changes for the Dolphins. Suddenly, they now know the Titans can throw the ball over the top. Putting eight or nine guys in the box is no longer an option on every play. That opens up the running game, which is exactly what the Titans wanted. If the TD stands, the Titans take a 7-3 lead and start to control the game on the ground. This serves two goals: Wear down Miami and keep your defense fresh. But the refs decided that an obvious no-call should take away the biggest play of the day for either team.

Two plays later, Cassel drops back and gets hit while he is throwing the ball. The ball travels a good 10-15 feet forwards in the air. Of the 22 players on the field, all but one stop playing. The pass is clearly incomplete. A lone Dolphin runs and picks up the ball and runs it to the end zone. Most of the refs have stopped officiating. One ref half-heartedly follows the Dolphin player but stops before he gets to the end zone. Dolphins' players from the sideline make their way onto the field while the ball is still being carried to the end zone. The refs huddle for two minutes and when it is all said and done, they announce that they ruled the ball a fumble and then a touchdown for Miami. (You can watch the play [here](#).)

There were probably 20 things wrong in how the officials handled that call. I don't really want to waste anyone's time going through all of them. I'll keep it simple by saying the refs were just as confused as the players and the fans and they really had no idea what happened in the play and they used the replay system to bail them out. It's the most cowardly and incompetent form of officiating out there and more and more NFL referees are doing it. They are relying more on the cameras than their own abilities and it is hurting the game.

Regardless of the details, this two-play sequence took 7

points off the board for the Titans and put 7 points on the board for the Dolphins. Without Marcus Mariota, the Titans just don't have enough offense to overcome that kind of scoring swing.

Coaches: 25% of the blame.

They ran the ball 18 times on Sunday. They threw the ball 32 times with a back-up QB. That's all you need to know about how the coaches did on Sunday. Unacceptable.

Matt Cassel: 10% of the blame.

I have heard way too many people put all the blame on Cassel. That's insane. He played poorly. But he did enough (before the refs pratfalled their way into the game) to win. IF the Walker TD stands, he ends up with 200 yards passing, 69% completion percentage, and 2 touchdowns. Not a bad day for a second string QB. But, he does deserve a little blame because he showed no pocket awareness, taking way too many sacks, and just didn't have the ability to make the big pass when his team needed him to in the 2nd half.

Offensive Line: 10% of the blame.

I realize they lost Taylor Lewan for the majority of the game and they were trying to protect a statue for QB, but this unit has to play better. If they don't get it figured out, this season will be a major disappointment and will set the Titans back a year in the development.

Roger Goodell: 10% of the blame.

Because in any conversation, Goodell deserves criticism.

Cracks in the Hull: Leadership

A few weeks ago I wrote about some things the NFL needs to do to improve its image. I highlighted a few areas, one of which was leadership. You can read that article [here](#). I've covered a [few of the issues](#) in the intervening weeks and would like to spend a little time on the leadership problem today.

Roger Goodell has finally issued a statement sort of saying that the players should stand for the National Anthem. Too little and too late. If Goodell was even average at his job, this is an issue he would have handled a long time ago. Instead, he tried to play politician for too long and it has cost the league dearly.

He needs to go. Now. I've been saying it for years. The decisions he has made as Commissioner will eventually ruin the league. We are starting to see the first signs of that. If the NFL wants to survive and thrive 20 years from now, they have to get rid of Goodell as soon as possible.

The NFL Needs To Change (The NFL on REO)

The NFL is in trouble. That's the bad news. The good news is that most of the problems with the league can be corrected, as long as the NFL acts decisively and quickly.

The NFL is best seen as a giant battleship. It's enormous and

built to last, yet its size makes it unwieldy and difficult to change course quickly. Right now, it is the biggest and baddest ship on the water, but it is headed in the wrong direction. To make matters worse, it has dozens of small cracks along its hull that are slowly taking in water. Not one of those cracks is enough to sink it, but collectively, those cracks will eventually bring it down.

The Cracks

The NFL has multiple image problems, some real and some imagined but no less damaging. This includes player safety, a problem that is a little bit of both. On one hand, the NFL sustained a massive self-inflicted wound with the way they handled concussions in the past. That crack is big and the league has done very little to patch it. On the flip side, many paint the NFL as too dangerous and too violent and are doing everything they can to bring it down. Everyone associated with the NFL – owners, players, fans – knows that the sport is dangerous and violent. It is part of the deal, and most of us are good with it. The day the players are no longer good with the risks is the day the league goes under for good.

Another image issue, and one that dominates headlines, is the National Anthem protests. We live in a society where the media thrive on controversy and division. The more hyperbolic the report, the better for business. Colin Kaepernick is the poster boy for this issue, though it has grown to be much larger than just one man. The problem with it is you have people from both sides of the political divide that are now [tuning out](#) because of it. Those on the far left are demanding that the NFL force someone to hire Kaepernick. (Stupidest idea possible.) Those on the far right feel that the league is full of a bunch of rich, entitled, unpatriotic jerks that hate the country and the flag. (Ignorant at best.) You know it is a

huge issue when commentators as good as Al Michaels are going out of their way to update you on who did or did not stand for the anthem. The media in general is terrible and sports media is not that much better. They have decided that this controversy deserves ALL THE COVERAGE because of ratings, not realizing that their constant coverage is going to hurt the ratings for the NFL, which will then hurt their own ratings.

Ladies and gentlemen, I give you: THE MEDIA



The League has a leadership problem.

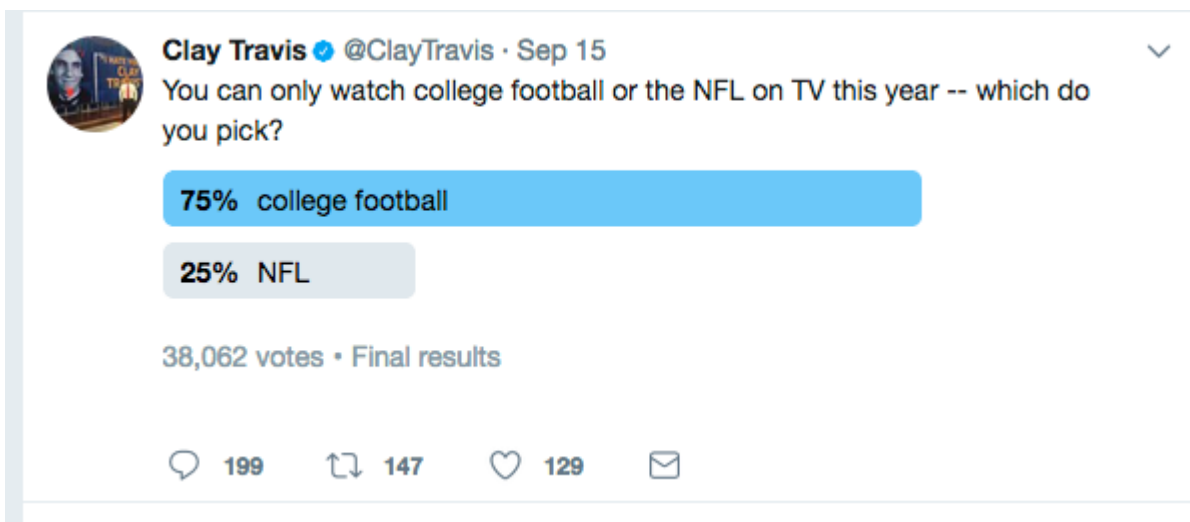
I don't care for Jerry Jones. He comes across as boorish and arrogant. If Jerry takes a position on something, I am usually going to be on the other side. But, [reports indicate](#) that he is standing in the way of Roger Goodell's contract extension. I believe I have made my thoughts about Goodell very clear in my time writing for REO. This then becomes similar to the recent presidential election. Do we have to side with one of these two?

With that said, many of the NFL's problems can be directly

traced back to Goodell or the overall leadership of the league. And even if the problems are not entirely Goodell's fault, sometimes it is just better to make a change in leadership for appearances. Most people don't care who the commissioner of the NFL is, but if they were to replace Goodell with someone with greater vision and self-awareness, it would do wonders for the overall image of the league.

The League has a product problem.

I saw a Twitter poll posted by Clay Travis recently that asked the question, "You can only watch college football or the NFL on TV this year – which do you pick?" And College Football won. Overwhelmingly.



Now, I realize this poll was posted by Clay Travis, someone who has made his career covering college football (and making fun of ESPN), but I think the results still have validity. There is a perception among many, right or wrong, that the college game is better than the pro game. I could post stats about blowouts in the college game, or how close games are in the NFL on average, but those stats usually fall on deaf ears. People see what they see and feel what they feel and stats and facts are rendered meaningless. The college game can be incredibly exciting. I enjoy it. But I enjoy watching the best

of the best playing the same sport on Sundays more. But there are issues built into the professional game that can be fixed or tweaked that will make the game more entertaining for fans, and the NFL needs to start working towards those soon or they will continue to lose fans.

Over the next few weeks, I will be doing my best to tackle a few of these issues and present some ideas for change. These cracks need to be fixed or the NFL will cease to be the powerhouse that it is. Let us know in the comment section what you would do to fix these issues. Or, if there are issues you have noticed that I have not addressed, let us hear about them.

Crack: The Diminishing Product

Thursday Night football is unwatchable.

I love the NFL. I can watch any real NFL game and be perfectly satisfied. I will watch a game between the New York Jets and the San Francisco 49ers and find plenty to enjoy.

But Thursday Night football is a completely different animal.

Thursday Night football is sloppy. TNF is ugly, poorly played, and worst of all, boring. TNF is a match-up between two teams that are tired and not recovered from the previous week. The product on the field completely supports my assertion – you only have to look at the most recent Thursday night game for proof.

Thursday Night football needs to be taken out back and put out of its misery. Effective immediately. It is a prime-time game that is as poor of a representation of actual professional football as one can find. It will not create new fans. It will

not engender good-will towards the league or the game itself. In fact, I contend it is doing the exact opposite. It is too much football. And it is football that is a poor representation of what the game is supposed to look like. It makes the NFL look greedy, ugly, and uninteresting.

NFL, if you want to keep your league at the top, get rid of Thursday Night football as soon as humanely possible. It is a blight on your league and your product. Focus your immense power and money on Sunday and Monday football. Make those games as good as they can be and stop diluting your sport with inferior product.

Titans Talk



That was fun. What we saw in the second half of the game against the Jaguars is what fans of this team are expecting this season. A physically dominant performance in all three phases of the game. And there is no Titans' player that better epitomized that physicality than Derrick Henry. Let me be clear about something – DeMarco Murray is the number one running back for the Titans. But until he is 100% healthy from the hamstring pull, Henry is the better option. The Titans have the luxury of having two number one backs on

their team and they need to take advantage of that starting Sunday against the Seahawks. Sit Murray and start Henry. Do that until Murray is completely healed. If they want to make a run late in the season and into the post season, they will need Murray. If you want to see what I mean by Henry being the best representation of Titans' football, go check out [this](#) article at [Music City Miracles](#). Those guys do great work covering the Titans.



There is a youth movement at work for the Titans and it should be very exciting for fans of the team. This year's draft is showing up all over the field, with players like Adoree' Jackson, Taywan Taylor, Jonnu Smith, Corey Davis, and Jayon Brown already playing big minutes and contributing in a number of ways. The future is very bright for the this team. Enjoy the ride Titans' fans.



This week poses a significant challenge for the Titans. The Seattle Seahawks are a good/great defense and they have a mobile QB that can extend plays with his legs. The Titans have struggled against mobile QB's in the past and Russell Wilson is better than most, so it will be imperative for the defense to stay on course and not deviate from their assignments. The good news is the Seahawks have a terrible offensive line and the Titans' pass rush should have plenty of opportunities to get to Wilson. For whatever reason, I have a similar feel about this game as I did for the Green Bay game last year. I am hopeful that the Titans' offense will pick up where they left off in the second half of the Jaguars' game. It should be a fun one.