



PossessionPointsSM

Points Of The Week Preseason Preview

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Preview Summary

Last year, we thought most of the strength was in the AFC. Well, the AFC may have been considered the stronger of the conferences, but it was an NFC team who ran away with the Super Bowl, plus both conferences had the exact same regular season win-loss record of 128-128. What that means is that the inter-conference games were a draw even though we expected they would be +20 in favor of the AFC.

So, this year we start with the numbers more balanced, and we see that there are a couple of divisions in both conferences where three or perhaps four teams could end up taking the Title. This year there are six AFC teams and four NFC teams that we have colored "Green" which means we wouldn't be surprised if any of these teams finished the season with the Lombardi Trophy.

We used last year's PossessionPoints Performance Rankings and adjusted these numbers with several other factors including "coaching continuity" and key changes in offense or defense. We then ran through the entire 2008 season game-for-game to come up with our overall ratings and expectations. For the record, PossessionPoints Performance Rankings differ greatly from the conventional Power Rankings used by media. Based on our own PossessionPoints stat, our Performance Rankings are completely objective and quantifiable. We do not add opinion or "feeling" into our equations. Because of this, we can separate out each team's performance and tell you if Team A is better ranked than Team B based on mathematics.

One change from last season: last year, we used a random factor to account for the "funny" bounces that footballs often take on the field. This year, we went away from the randomness, and let the numbers and adjustments ride for themselves -- only adjusting game-by-game for home field advantage.

In the team-for-team write-ups that follow, you will see the team's schedule and the games our algorithm selected them to win or lose. In many cases, we will talk about where the teams are projected to be before any adjustments were made and where they

AFC	Projected Record
Patriots	14 - 2
Chargers	13 - 3
Jaguars	12 - 4
Steelers	12 - 4
Colts	10 - 6
Titans	10 - 6
Browns	9 - 7
Texans	9 - 7
Bengals	8 - 8
Broncos	8 - 8
Raiders	7 - 9
Bills	6 - 10
Ravens	6 - 10
Jets	5 - 11
Chiefs	3 - 13
Dolphins	2 - 14

stand based solely on last year's performance and this year's schedule. The results surprised us in many cases, so we want to make sure we highlight these findings.

The result of our number crunching for 2008 again made the AFC look stronger winning 12 more games than the NFC. Last season, we had the AFC winning 20 more games, and as we noted above, their win-loss records were dead even. Perhaps, we are over weighted on the AFC, but we are sticking with our forecast.

Looking at the AFC, the Patriots and either the Chargers, Steelers or perhaps Jaguars look to be the teams that will get first-round playoff byes.

To qualify for "Green", the team record needs to be 10-6 or better. Teams that were 6-10 or better were given "Yellow". "Yellow" teams in our opinion could get to the playoffs, and particularly with the NFC teams, they may get to the Super Bowl, but we would be surprised if they were to win it.

There are a number (7) of teams in the AFC in the "Yellow". Depending on injuries and some big plays in big games, these teams' seasons could go toward the playoffs or toward an early vacation.

Teams in the "Red" are teams that would surprise us if they made the playoffs, and if they did turn things around this year and win a playoff spot, we would be surprised if they could win in the first-round. There are only three AFC teams in the "Red" this year, and we will talk about all of them in detail on their individual pages.

Unlike last year where most NFC teams were in the "Yellow", the picture for the NFC looks quite similar to the AFC. There are only four teams that our computer's algorithm gave records that we classified as "Green", and three of them are in the NFC East. The Eagles, Cowboys and Giants join the Saints as the "Green" teams. Like last year, the Saints seem to have all the pieces in place to make this a very special year. Hopefully, for Saints' fans, New Orleans won't be as schizophrenic in their play this year and win a game before almost mid-season.

There are eight NFC teams in the "Yellow" - one more than the AFC. At the top of the list are the Cardinals, Panthers, Redskins, and Seahawks. While the Seahawks and Cardinals may need a tie-breaker to decide the division, the Redskins will be 4th by our projections in the very tough NFC East. The Vikings are forecast to win the NFC North with just a 9-7 record, so obviously this division could go to a team that gets hot- maybe the Packers or perhaps the Lions. Should the Bears emerge from the "Red" and be the surprise team, we would not be caught off guard, but we will talk more about that on the Bears' page. Once again, injuries and a few big plays in key games could make all the difference for these teams and their seasons. We will talk about how a team might improve or falter on each of the individual team pages.

There are 4 teams in the "Red" in the NFC, and if history is any guide, one of these teams will surprise us on the upside and make a run at the playoffs. However, as of today, these teams appear to have their work cut out for them. The Falcons' record is hurt by their inability to find a competent replacement for Michael Vick and their second coaching change in as many years. If the Falcons are the team to have a good season, we would be most surprised. Maybe their number one pick, Matt Ryan, is the real deal, but it is very rare that a rookie QB makes that much of a difference.

NFC	Projected Record
Saints	13 - 3
Eagles	12 - 4
Cowboys	11 - 5
Giants	10 - 6
Cardinals	9 - 7
Panthers	9 - 7
Redskins	9 - 7
Seahawks	9 - 7
Vikings	9 - 7
Bucs	7 - 9
Packers	7 - 9
Lions	6 - 10
Rams	4 - 12
Bears	3 - 13
49ers	2 - 14
Falcons	2 - 14

Super Bowl 2009

When we look at the “Green” teams in the league, we feel any of them in either conference could catch a “Giant” wave like late season’s winner and ride it into the playoffs and perhaps Super Bowl. But we have to make a prediction; so, we leave our emotions out of the whole process and let the computer crank through the teams after posting their adjusted numbers. The result, according to the computer, is that the Saints edge out the Eagles in the NFC Championship game, and the Patriots defeat the Steelers in the AFC. We are sure everyone is wondering what happened to “America’s Team” – the Cowboys and, of course last year’s World Champions – the Giants? The computer has the Cowboys falling to the Eagles and the Giants falling to the Saints. In the AFC, the Jaguars and Chargers also come up one-week short of getting into the Championship game. Okay, that’s all well and good, but the question is: Who will win the Super Bowl? At the risk of being boring and tedious, the computer picks... (DRUM ROLL PLEASE) The NEW ENGLAND PATRIOTS. After the statistically supreme season the Patriots had in 2007, what choice did our little worker bee machine have? Who did you think we were going to say? The Dolphins?

AFC East – Patriots

Summary:

We hate to sound redundant, but we cannot avoid our findings. Once again, the Patriots are the PossessionPoints favorite to win the Super Bowl. While we are impressed with what New England will bring to this season, we are not convinced that the Patriots will be able to keep up the overall high level of performance that they had in 2007 -- which, let's be honest-- was off the charts even if they did lose the Big Trophy. So, we are going to lower our expectations for the Patriots' offense by 20% and their defense by 10%. These numerical alterations plus the other team adjustments, still yielded a 14-2 record according to our computer. It appears the Patriots should once again walk away with the AFC East.

Room for improvement:

Well, if the Patriots can repeat their 2007 level of performance, our numbers naturally have them going 16-0. That record would give them victories over the Colts and Chargers on the road. While we don't see New England having quite as easy a trek to the Super Bowl as last year, we nonetheless see them in the Big Dance.

How they could falter:

It will probably take a key injury or two – say to Tom Brady and Randy Moss (no jinx intended), to derail the Patriots this year. But if they do suffer such a hardship, New England will become vulnerable to a late season slump. When we took our unadjusted data and dropped their offense by 40% and defense by 25%, their record fell to 9-7. The added losses were all at the end of the year when they play the Seahawks, Raiders and Bills on the road and the Cardinals at home. Overall, the Patriots do not appear to have a killer schedule that you might expect a Super Bowl team to have, but that is mainly due to how weak their conference (the AFC East) appears to be. In addition, New England is playing teams in the NFC West which is not exactly the strongest conference in the NFC or the NFL.

Biggest Question Marks:

Will the loss of Asante Samuel have as big a negative impact on their defense as we expect? (We know they will miss his interceptions). In general, we expect the defense to be a little weaker but overall just fine without Samuel.

Schedule projection: 14-2

Patriots	Opponent	Field	Preview
Week 1	Chiefs	Home	W
Week 2	Jets	Away	W
Week 3	Dolphins	Home	W
Week 4	BYE	BYE	X
Week 5	49ers	Away	W
Week 6	Chargers	Away	L
Week 7	Broncos	Home	W
Week 8	Rams	Home	W
Week 9	Colts	Away	L
Week 10	Bills	Home	W
Week 11	Jets	Home	W
Week 12	Dolphins	Away	W
Week 13	Steelers	Home	W
Week 14	Seahawks	Away	W
Week 15	Raiders	Away	W
Week 16	Cardinals	Home	W
Week 17	Bills	Away	W

Can Tom Brady have another Hall of Fame year? Tons of Fantasy Football players hope so, but it is going to be very difficult for him to repeat the kind of success he had in 2007.

AFC East – Bills

Summary:

The Bills actually backtracked a bit last season, and their 2007 PossessionPoints performance was worse than their 2006 performance. Buffalo's offense fell to a rank of 29th - down slightly from their rank of 27th in 2006. Their defense also didn't fare well, plummeting to 20th from a ranking of 11th in 2006. Will Head Coach Dick Jauron, who is now in his third year, be able to reverse this trend? We bumped their offensive numbers up slightly by 5%, but we could not justify an improvement in their defensive numbers after their 2007 performance.

The addition of rookie Cornerback Leodis McKelvin and the return of second-year Linebacker Paul Posluszny, who is back from an injury, could produce the improvement in the defense we didn't put in the numbers. On offense, they obviously need a good amount of help and rookie Wide Receiver James Hardy may be the ticket.

Room for improvement:

Despite their poor statistical performance last season, the Bills still managed to end up with a 7-9 record. No doubt there is room for them to outperform this year's forecasted 6-10 record. So, where might improvement come from? If we were to adjust their PossessionPoints performance numbers upwards a great deal, we could see that the Bills' games at the Rams, Broncos, Jets and Chiefs could turn out to be wins for Buffalo and their home games with the Browns and maybe the Chargers could turn their way as well. A sign that the Bills are bound for improvement will have to wait until at least week 4. We forecast they will win 2 of their first 3 even though we only see them at 6-10.

How they could falter:

Losing their opener to Seattle would really start the season off on a sour note. Seattle has a big stake in this game. A Seahawks' loss to Buffalo could mean Seattle losing the division title.. When the Jets come to town in week 9, Brett Favre will either be the toast of NY -- or just plain toast. If he is the toast of the City, watch out because Favre and the Jets could come away with the win. We don't think the Dolphins are going to be much of a factor again this year and are forecasting a sweep for the season series. If Bill Parcells has his Dolphins playing as a cohesive team, even a split of the two games could cost the Bills.

The AFC East looks like anyone but the Patriots could fall apart and have a 2-14 or 1-15 season. For the sake of Dick Jauron and the Bills' fans, we hope it isn't the Bills.

Biggest Question Marks:

J.P. Losman, will he enter the ranks of the top QB's in the NFL or will he be a mid-level performer? Mid-level performers can get you to the playoffs, but it will take a superstar year from Running Back Marshawn Lynch for that to happen. Unfortunately for Bills' fans, we expect little difference from 2007.

Schedule projection: 6 – 10

Bills	Opponent	Field	Preview
Week 1	Seahawks	Home	W
Week 2	Jaguars	Away	L
Week 3	Raiders	Home	W
Week 4	Rams	Away	L
Week 5	Cardinals	Away	L
Week 6	BYE	BYE	x
Week 7	Chargers	Home	L
Week 8	Dolphins	Away	W
Week 9	Jets	Home	W
Week 10	Patriots	Away	L
Week 11	Browns	Home	L
Week 12	Chiefs	Away	L
Week 13	49ers	Home	W
Week 14	Dolphins	Home	W
Week 15	Jets	Away	L
Week 16	Broncos	Away	L
Week 17	Patriots	Home	L

AFC East – Jets

Summary:

The Jets were not a good PossessionPoints team in 2007 with the 23rd ranked offense and 29th ranked defense according to our stat. These are not the kind of numbers, that left unadjusted, would make for a successful 2008. Initially, we didn't see much reason to adjust their numbers at all despite the offseason additions of Alan Faneca and Bubba Franks. Then along came Brett Favre! Yep, after weeks of Favre saying he was not interested in playing for the Jets, he winds up in NY. The addition of Brett Favre at QB means an adjustment upward for the Jets' offensive PossessionPoints numbers. We moved these numbers up 25%. The Defense may also be helped by the addition of the number-one draft pick Vernon Gholston - the linebacker from Ohio State, so we also increased their Defensive performance 5%.

Room for improvement:

The Jets' schedule starts with the Dolphins on the road, and this would be a good opportunity to turn a projected L into a W. The Dolphins will be somewhat improved but not a powerhouse to be feared. This game could easily be a W for the Jets and start NY toward building that all important confidence. The next two games against the Patriots and Chargers are very difficult contests, and we don't see the Jets flipping those games into the W column even with the most optimistic numbers we could put into the spreadsheet. For example, to get the Jets to a 9-7 record, we needed to increase their offensive PossessionPoints performance by 50%. Even those adjusted numbers will still keep the Jets out of the Playoffs. To get NY to the Playoffs, we had to increase their offensive numbers by 60% which is a generous adjustment to say the least. If the Jets do improve further, you could see the additional wins against the Cardinals, and Bengals at home and the 49ers on the road. So, if the Jets do manage to go 2-2 in the first 4 games, there is a chance they could work their way into the Playoff picture in the AFC.

How they could falter:

They can't fall too far from where they are now. However, when we dropped their 2007 performance numbers by just 10% on offense and 10% on defense, their projected record went to 0-16 (YIKES!). So Jets' fans, Favre better be the key to your team's improvement because if their numbers fall from where they are now, it will be a very, very long season.

Biggest Question Marks:

Eric Mangini is now in his third year as head coach, and we must ask: will the real Eric Mangini please stand up? Will it be the Man-genius of 2006 or the Man under fire of 2007? Will Favre be the same with the Jets as he was last year with the Pack? Will Vernon Gholston be able to be the kind of impact player in the NFL that he was in the Big Ten? We expect big things from Gholston, but we don't think it will be enough to carry the Jets to the Playoffs. We also think Favre is an upgrade, but we still have them colored "Red" for the season.

Schedule projection: 5-11

Jets	Opponent	Field	Preview
Week 1	Dolphins	Away	L
Week 2	Patriots	Home	L
Week 3	Chargers	Away	L
Week 4	Cardinals	Home	L
Week 5	BYE	BYE	x
Week 6	Bengals	Home	L
Week 7	Raiders	Away	L
Week 8	Chiefs	Home	W
Week 9	Bills	Away	L
Week 10	Rams	Home	W
Week 11	Patriots	Away	L
Week 12	Titans	Away	L
Week 13	Broncos	Home	W
Week 14	49ers	Away	L
Week 15	Bills	Home	W
Week 16	Seahawks	Away	L
Week 17	Dolphins	Home	W

AFC East – Dolphins

Summary:

Like the Jets, the Dolphins were not a good PossessionPoints team in 2007 with their offense ranking 20th and their defense ranking dead last at 32nd. This is the second year in a row that the Dolphins have been near the bottom of the PossessionPoints rankings. Also, for the second year in a row, the Dolphins have a new Coach in Tony Sparano. Sparano was brought in by new VP of Operations Bill Parcells. Parcells has had success as a coach, but we will see how he does as a team builder. Mostly on the reputation of Parcells, we have adjusted the Dolphins' offense and defense up 10% each. Even with this adjustment, our forecast only brings them to 2-14 and last place in the weak AFC East.

The Dolphins will try another QB, Chad Pennington, who became unceremoniously available, when the Jets picked up Brett Favre. Pennington joins the other Chad – Chad Henne – who the Dolphins drafted out of Michigan. We guess Parcells likes to collect Chads in Florida, but we are sure he won't leave those Chads hanging too long before they know their roles.

Room for improvement:

Actually, the computer does give hope if the Dolphins can improve their performance 15% more on offense and defense. If we up their improvement to 25% in each category, their projected record actually vaults all the way to 10-6. Could the Dolphins be a team we color "Red" that makes the playoffs? (If they are such a team, Bill Parcells deserves every penny and then some of the multi-million dollars he is being paid). According to our algorithms, the Dolphins' fans could see wins against the Chargers, Ravens, Bills, Seahawks, Raiders, Rams, Chiefs and Jets. Hey, stranger things have happened in this league. In this optimistic scenario, the Dolphins would be in the hunt for a wildcard with the 2nd and 3rd place teams in the AFC South (one of the strongest divisions in the NFL).

The Dolphins' fans will have to wait a few weeks before getting their hopes up that this will be a successful season since we have them winning on opening day but still just winning 2 games this season.

How they could falter:

Well, we guess they could lose the 2 games we project they will win: opening day against the Jets and week 15 against the 49ers.

While the Dolphins could be as hapless as they were last year, we really think the 2-win mark should be achievable.

Biggest Question Marks:

New coach and management, can they work wonders? We think this will take a couple of years to really show a significant difference, but there could be positive signs this season. If the PossessionPoints forecast is wrong with the Dolphins, we think it will be wrong on the low side.

Schedule projection: 2- 14

Dolphins	Opponent	Field	Preview
Week 1	Jets	Home	W
Week 2	Cardinals	Away	L
Week 3	Patriots	Away	L
Week 4	BYE	BYE	x
Week 5	Chargers	Home	L
Week 6	Texans	Away	L
Week 7	Ravens	Home	L
Week 8	Bills	Home	L
Week 9	Broncos	Away	L
Week 10	Seahawks	Home	L
Week 11	Raiders	Home	L
Week 12	Patriots	Home	L
Week 13	Rams	Away	L
Week 14	Bills	Away	L
Week 15	49ers	Home	W
Week 16	Chiefs	Away	L
Week 17	Jets	Away	L

AFC North – Steelers

Summary:

The Steelers were a very good PossessionPoints team in 2007, and as in 2006, they were better than their record would indicate. Their offense ranked second only to the Patriots in PossessionPoints while their defense was 3rd best in the league. The Steelers were a playoff team, but their PossessionPoints numbers easily could have carried them to a better mark than their final 10-6 number. If second year coach, Mike Tomlin, can pull things together and stick to a similar game plan as last year, the Steelers could have a very special year. We actually reduced their offense by 10% and left their defense unadjusted. If our projections were to come true, Pittsburgh would end up with the 7th best offense and 4th best defense in 2008 and a 12-4 record.

Room for improvement:

Truthfully, there isn't much room for improvement. Our "unadjusted" numbers which were our starting point had the Steelers going 14-2. The difference were wins at Cleveland and Philadelphia. Should they pick up an early road win against one or both of these teams, the Steelers could experience a dream season. The games at Jacksonville and New England still look like tall orders for the Steelers.

How they could falter:

This is an easy one. Our projected 12-4 record has the Steelers losing 3 of their first 5 games. A 2-3 start could shake the confidence of even a good team like the Steelers. We can't emphasize enough the importance of confidence in the NFL. Just look at the young Packers of 2007 who caught a couple of breaks and won some tight early games and built on that confidence. One or two early losses can shake the confidence of a good team, and "bad breaks" could follow. Should their confidence get rattled, then losses at the Bengals, Redskins, Ravens and Titans as well as home losses to Colts and Cowboys could follow. That would produce a playoff missing 6-10 record.

That would really be unfortunate for the Steelers who should be much better than that. The schedule starts tough but then eases up. If they can weather the early storm they should be fine.

Schedule projection: 12- 4

Steelers	Opponent	Field	Preview
Week 1	Texans	Home	W
Week 2	Browns	Away	L
Week 3	Eagles	Away	L
Week 4	Ravens	Home	W
Week 5	Jaguars	Away	L
Week 6	BYE	BYE	x
Week 7	Bengals	Away	W
Week 8	Giants	Home	W
Week 9	Redskins	Away	W
Week 10	Colts	Home	W
Week 11	Chargers	Home	W
Week 12	Bengals	Home	W
Week 13	Patriots	Away	L
Week 14	Cowboys	Home	W
Week 15	Ravens	Away	W
Week 16	Titans	Away	W
Week 17	Browns	Home	W

Biggest Question Marks:

The Steelers love to run, and that helps their PossessionPoints statistics too. Will Willie Parker come back from his broken fibula and be the primary feature Back everyone expects? If he doesn't, will rookie Running Back Rashard Mendenhall be able to pick up the slack? We rated Mendenhall very high in our draft issue and liked this pick by the Steelers. He could be an invaluable asset if Parker's performance is short of expectations.

AFC North – Browns

Summary:

The Browns made great strides in 2007 in terms of PossessionPoints. And just to show that big adjustments aren't unreasonable, we would like to point out that in 2007 the Browns offense improved 66%. Their PossessionPoints offense went from 30th in 2006 to 10th last season. However, their defense did not make great strides last season and moved up just one notch to 26th. With the offense apparently on the right track, perhaps third year Coach Romeo Crennel can leverage his past experience as Defensive Coordinator of the Patriots and make improvements on the defensive side. While we don't expect either unit to improve by 60+% this year, we did improve both by 10% for this year's forecast. That produced a playoff-missing 9-7 record, one win worse than last year. Why? Blame it on the schedule. Last year, they got to play the NFC west teams while this year they must face what we see as the 2 best divisions in football: the NFC East and the AFC South.

Room for improvement:

The small adjustments we made took them from a projected 6-10 record on the unadjusted page to a 9-7 record. So how can they get so much better? Well, as we saw with the Bengals, small adjustments mean a lot. If we adjust their offense and defense up another 10%, they vault to a 13-3 record and win the division. The improvement would all come on the road as they would pick up wins at the Ravens, Bengals, Redskins and Titans.

How they could falter:

Well, Browns' fans, when we go to the unadjusted sheet and look at the 3 games that are different, two of them are the first 2 home games of the year against the Steelers and Cowboys. That would not be a good thing because then the forecast would have the Browns starting the season at just 1 – 6. A start like that would kill their confidence and maybe their season, and the Browns would be lucky to finish 6-10. The other added loss would be home against the Colts. But as we said above, if that were the only additional loss, Cleveland would be very lucky.

Biggest Question Marks:

Will Derek Anderson and the Browns prove to be a team to contend with like they were in 2007 or will they be the victims of the maniacal schedule maker that had this division face both the AFC South and NFC East? The good news for the Browns is that they are not alone in this predicament. The Steelers, Bengals and Ravens share their schedule pain. In fact, the Steelers need to overcome a schedule which we project will have the opponents with the most wins on it. The other good news for the Browns is last year's emergence of a real dominant Wide Receiver, Braylon Edwards. This year, they add Donte' Stallworth, who was most recently with the Patriots, to complement Edwards. If Anderson can come close to his performance last year, we are comfortable with the 9-7 projection.

Schedule projection: 9 – 7

Browns	Opponent	Field	Preview
Week 1	Cowboys	Home	W
Week 2	Steelers	Home	W
Week 3	Ravens	Away	L
Week 4	Bengals	Away	L
Week 5	BYE	BYE	x
Week 6	Giants	Home	W
Week 7	Redskins	Away	L
Week 8	Jaguars	Away	L
Week 9	Ravens	Home	W
Week 10	Broncos	Home	W
Week 11	Bills	Away	W
Week 12	Texans	Home	W
Week 13	Colts	Home	W
Week 14	Titans	Away	L
Week 15	Eagles	Away	L
Week 16	Bengals	Home	W
Week 17	Steelers	Away	L

AFC North – Bengals

Summary:

The Bengals were a middle of the road PossessionPoints team again in 2007 with a middle of the road record of 7-9. Their offense was the best of any team not making the playoffs at 7th while their defense was near the bottom of the league at 24th. We would have liked to see the Bengals work a little harder on improving their defense in the off-season. But we think with the return of a solid Carson Palmer plus TJ Houshmandzadeh and Chad Johnson both apparently happy in camp, the offense could continue to click. So, we adjusted their offensive numbers up by 10% and left the defense unchanged. The end result was a mediocre 8-8 projection. If Coach Marvin Lewis and the Bengals are to surprise us on the upside, he has to find a way to get more out of that defense than we expect.

Room for improvement:

The Bengals amazed us in that minor adjustments could truly alter the team's direction. Remember, the unadjusted projection was for 7-9, just like 2007, but there is a lot of upside. How much? How about 13-3 with a 20% improvement in their defense? They would accomplish this with wins at the Ravens, Giants, Texans and Browns and a home win against the Steelers.

While we don't have the Bengals in the playoffs this year, it isn't out of the realm of possibility. Palmer is a very good Quarterback with excellent targets in Chad Johnson and T.J. Houshmandzadeh.

How they could falter:

Well, things could get dicey quickly for Cincy if they lose their home opener to the Titans. That would set them up for a 1-4 start that could rock the confidence of even the best teams. If that were to happen, we see a downside as low as 3-13 with additional losses coming at the Jets and Jaguars and home losses to the Eagles and Redskins.

So, there you have it. We could talk our way into the Bengals making the playoffs or collapsing to the point where it would most likely be Lewis's last season at the helm. Like last year, we see the Bengals as a swing team whose season we project to be average but won't be surprised no matter what happens.

Schedule projection: 8 – 8

Bengals	Opponent	Field	Preview
Week 1	Ravens	Away	L
Week 2	Titans	Home	W
Week 3	Giants	Away	L
Week 4	Browns	Home	W
Week 5	Cowboys	Away	L
Week 6	Jets	Away	W
Week 7	Steelers	Home	L
Week 8	BYE	BYE	x
Week 9	Jaguars	Home	W
Week 10	Texans	Away	L
Week 11	Eagles	Home	W
Week 12	Steelers	Away	L
Week 13	Ravens	Home	W
Week 14	Colts	Away	L
Week 15	Redskins	Home	W
Week 16	Browns	Away	L
Week 17	Chiefs	Home	W

Biggest Question Marks:

Hopefully, off-field problems and suspensions are mostly a thing of the past since the Bengals have re-signed troubled Wide Receiver Chris Henry. The big question is will Marvin Lewis regain the magic touch he possessed early in his career? If he can't find that magic, this year may be his last.

AFC North – Ravens

Summary:

The Ravens were a big disappointment in 2007, and it cost Brian Billick his job. The Ravens head into 2008 with new Head Coach, John Harbaugh. Harbaugh will have his work cut out for him as the 2007 Ravens finished 24th in PossessionPoints offense and a surprisingly weak 18th in defense. We say surprising because in 2006 they were the number 1 defense. This explains their 5-11 record for last season. We figure the Ravens will rebound some, so we adjusted their defense up over 20%. We also adjusted their offense up 10%. Even with these positive adjustments, the computer still spits out a miserable 6-10 record.

It will take a lot for the Ravens to regain the top spot in this division. In the last few years, the Steelers and Browns have both improved and both have set their sights on the top spot.

Room for improvement:

Most certainly - but we highly doubt that Baltimore can get back to the 13 wins they had in 2006. As we adjusted their performance upwards, they picked up wins at the Texans, Bengals and Browns and home against the Jaguars and Eagles. So on the upside, 11 wins would seem to be the ceiling, and that would put rookie Coach Harbaugh in the playoffs.

How they could falter:

Well, they can't fall as far as they did last year. In 2007, the Ravens won 6 fewer games than they did in 2006. To repeat that decline would produce just 1 win. We don't see the Ravens falling that far. Our unadjusted numbers had them winning just 3 games and even as we adjusted their numbers lower by 10 percent, they still stayed at the 3-win level. So which 3 games are in question? From our analysis, home games with the Bengals, Titans and Redskins are games we have in the W column that are most likely to become L's.

In the end, it looks like 3 wins should be the floor for the 2008 Ravens.

Biggest Question Marks:

Will Coach Harbaugh be able to recapture the Raven defensive prowess and lead this team more effectively than Billick? Who will quarterback the Ravens in 08? Harbaugh has 3 choices, a veteran Kyle Boller, second-year former Heisman winner, Troy Smith, and a rookie, Joe Flacco, from Delaware. Glad we aren't in Harbaugh's shoes for this decision, PossessionPoints doesn't like it when a team doesn't have a clear cut choice at #1 QB, so we may be out on a limb with our adjustments up. All things considered, we think Brian Billick was a pretty good coach. Yes, he has had some tough times, and perhaps moving on will be best for the Ravens, but we think Harbaugh will need more than a year to get the Ravens back into the post season and his Quarterback situation solidified.

Schedule projection: 6 - 10

Ravens	Opponent	Field	Preview
Week 1	Bengals	Home	W
Week 2	Texans	Away	L
Week 3	Browns	Home	W
Week 4	Steelers	Away	L
Week 5	Titans	Home	W
Week 6	Colts	Away	L
Week 7	Dolphins	Away	W
Week 8	Raiders	Home	W
Week 9	Browns	Away	L
Week 10	BYE	BYE	x
Week 11	Giants	Away	L
Week 12	Eagles	Home	L
Week 13	Bengals	Away	L
Week 14	Redskins	Home	W
Week 15	Steelers	Home	L
Week 16	Cowboys	Away	L
Week 17	Jaguars	Home	L

AFC South – Jaguars

Summary:

PossessionPoints has broken with many forecasters and projected a “changing of the guard” in the NFC South. That’s right Jacksonville fans, we have the Jaguars winning the division with a 12-4 record. The Jaguars were a very good PossessionPoints team in 2007, ranking 3rd in offense and 12th in defense. Their 2007 regular season record of 12-4 is the same record we project for this season. This was after we adjusted the Jags offense down 5%. Credit our forecast for a fall off by the Colts if you must, but we think this year could be the year the Jaguars finally stop sailing under the radar and get some attention as a Super Bowl threat. This year, there is no question that David Garrard is the QB. Last year, when we wrote the preseason preview, we expected that Byron Leftwich may be the starter. To his credit, coach Jack DelRio made sure there would be no controversy and cut Leftwich before the season started.

The playoff should be a minimum expectation for the Jags, if they don’t win the division they should get one of the 2 AFC wildcards.

Room for improvement:

If the Jags prepare well for their division opponents on the road, they actually could improve on this projection. The “no-adjust” sheet actually had them running away with the division with a 15-1 record. So, yes Jags’ fans, there is actually plenty of room for improvement on this forecast. On the “no-adjust” case, they only lose at the Colts in week 3. That could give them a first-round bye and home field throughout the playoffs. The Super Bowl should not be an unthinkable prospect in Jacksonville this year.

How they could falter:

We adjusted their offense down 20% and defense down 15%, and their record only fell to 8-8. While that wouldn’t make the playoffs, it is a better record than most teams would wind up with if they had that severe a performance degradation. Were this downturn to happen, the additional 4 losses would come in the home games against the Steelers, Packers and Colts and the away game at the Ravens. So, if the Jags are to falter, it would be a late season swoon that would cost them. Note the projection on the right has them 5-3 in their first 8 games and 7-1 in their last 8.

Schedule projection: 12 – 4

Jaguars	Opponent	Field	Preview
Week 1	Titans	Away	L
Week 2	Bills	Home	W
Week 3	Colts	Away	L
Week 4	Texans	Home	W
Week 5	Steelers	Home	W
Week 6	Broncos	Away	W
Week 7	BYE	BYE	x
Week 8	Browns	Home	W
Week 9	Bengals	Away	L
Week 10	Lions	Away	W
Week 11	Titans	Home	W
Week 12	Vikings	Home	W
Week 13	Texans	Away	L
Week 14	Bears	Away	W
Week 15	Packers	Home	W
Week 16	Colts	Home	W
Week 17	Ravens	Away	W

Biggest Question Marks:

Will new Wide Receiver Jerry Porter give the Jags’ the threat they need to keep defenses from keying on Maurice Jones-Drew and Fred Taylor out of the backfield? Porter hasn’t been 100% in preseason, so the answer to that question will have to wait for the regular season. Expect Defensive Coordinators around the league to stack 8 men up “in-the-box” to stop the run and try to force the Jags to beat them with the pass. If no Wide Receiver can become a reliable #1, then the downside projection is more likely than the rosy one which was mostly highlighted above.

AFC South – Colts

Summary:

The Colts were once again a great PossessionPoints offensive team in 2007 ranking 4th in the league. Their defense improved 15% from 2006 but still was not in the top 10. We adjusted the Colts offensive and defensive numbers up 5%, assuming there will be no ill effects from Peyton Manning's knee surgery. We were somewhat surprised when the computer spit out a 10-6 record and second place in the division. They would make the playoffs as a wildcard, and given that wildcard teams have been winning Super Bowls lately, that may not be a bad thing. We became a little less surprised when we looked at the projected records of their opponents and we noted that they, too, have one of the toughest schedules. Only the Steelers, Bengals and Redskins have tougher ones if our projections prove out.

Room for improvement:

Certainly, there is room if their division isn't as strong as we think it will be. Since their defensive performance has the most room for improvement, we adjusted their defense up 15% more to see what would happen. The result was 3 more wins - given that they could beat the Texans, Titans and Browns. This is not unreasonable and certainly in keeping with the kind of team the Colts have become since Manning has matured into a "Hall-of-Fame" type quarterback.

How they could falter:

While nothing is "safe" in the NFL, we think opening day against the Bears has a fairly certain outcome, but we do add one big caveat (see biggest question marks below). We took their offensive numbers down 15% (they went down 9% last year) and their projected record fell to a nightmarish 6-10. The losses show up early - at the Vikings and home against the Jaguars then at the Packers and at home against the Patriots in the middle of the year. While the Colts' fans surely don't want to face such a proposition, we must note that there is some risk that the Colts could miss the playoffs in 2008.

Biggest Question Marks:

What is a Bursa Sac and will Peyton Manning's surgery to repair an infected one affect the 2008 Colts? We'll let you "Google" "bursa sac" yourself to get the answer to the first part. But what effect it will have on the 2008 Colts, we won't know until opening day because while the Colts hope and expect he will be ready, he is not going to play in any preseason games. If Manning is unable to go - well, read the "how they could falter" above!

Schedule projection: 10 – 6

Colts	Opponent	Field	Preview
Week 1	Bears	Home	W
Week 2	Vikings	Away	W
Week 3	Jaguars	Home	W
Week 4	BYE	BYE	x
Week 5	Texans	Away	L
Week 6	Ravens	Home	W
Week 7	Packers	Away	W
Week 8	Titans	Away	L
Week 9	Patriots	Home	W
Week 10	Steelers	Away	L
Week 11	Texans	Home	W
Week 12	Chargers	Away	L
Week 13	Browns	Away	L
Week 14	Bengals	Home	W
Week 15	Lions	Home	W
Week 16	Jaguars	Away	L
Week 17	Titans	Home	W

AFC South – Titans

Summary:

As Vince Young continues to grow and mature, so do the Titans. Last year, people expected more out of Young, but Young was slowed by a quadriceps injury. This year, Young could return to his rookie health, now smarter and more experienced. So, the Titans now appear to be the third very good team in the AFC South. Is this the “best division” in football? Let the debates begin between AFC South fans and NFC East fans. With another year of experience and a fresh start for Young, we upped the Titans’ offensive numbers by 10%. We also improved their defense by 5% and let the computer do its magic. The result: a record of 10-6 and a wildcard bid. There will be no rumblings about Jeff Fisher’s job security if they turn in a 10-6 record. Fisher will be back for a 15th season in 2009.

Rookie Running Back Chris Johnson could be the surprise of the season should he develop into a big threat complement to LenDale White. Together, they could open up the field and allow Young to find his receivers downfield.

Room for improvement:

It would take some doing, but if the Titans could manage a 20% improvement in offense and a 10% improvement in defense, then the computer thinks they could go 14-2. The resulting win/loss picture would have them only losing games at the Jaguars and Colts - two division foes. We told you this is a tough division.

How they could falter:

Injuries can happen to anyone, and the Titans’ health may well be tied to the health of Vince Young. If he sustains an injury that keeps him out of any significant game, the Titans could have problems. The unadjusted projected record was 7-9 and a drop of just 5% on offense produced a 6-10 record. The problems would pop up early with all 4 of the additional losses coming in the first 9 weeks. Home losses to the Jags, Colts, and Packers coupled with a road loss to the Chiefs is what would bring on this hellish scenario.

Biggest Question Marks:

Will Vince Young become a superstar or another in a long line of “athletic” Quarterbacks whose propensity to run into big Defensive Linemen and Linebackers causes them to become “injury prone”? Most people running into 300-pound Linemen and 275-pound, lightning-fast Linebackers would become injury prone too. But durability is an important part of success at quarterback in the NFL. Perhaps, Young should take notice of how his durable colleagues - namely Tom Brady and the Manning Boys - make an art form of the 3D’s – Dodge, Duck and Dive. This philosophy would keep Young from injuries that might derail his promising career.

Schedule projection: 10 – 6

Titans	Opponent	Field	Preview
Week 1	Jaguars	Home	W
Week 2	Bengals	Away	L
Week 3	Texans	Home	W
Week 4	Vikings	Home	W
Week 5	Ravens	Away	L
Week 6	BYE	BYE	x
Week 7	Chiefs	Away	W
Week 8	Colts	Home	W
Week 9	Packers	Home	W
Week 10	Bears	Away	W
Week 11	Jaguars	Away	L
Week 12	Jets	Home	W
Week 13	Lions	Away	W
Week 14	Browns	Home	W
Week 15	Texans	Away	L
Week 16	Steelers	Home	L
Week 17	Colts	Away	L

AFC South – Texans

Summary:

Coach Gary Kubiak is entering his 3rd season at Houston, and we cannot help but feel a little sorry for him. He has done a fantastic job, but his team has the misfortune of being in perhaps the best division in the NFL. The Texans made dramatic strides in their PossessionPoints offensive measurements last year improving 27%. Their 8-8 record was also an improvement from 2006's 6-10 mark. Given that Kubiak has been successful as an Offensive Coordinator, we are forecasting that his Head Coaching progression will continue, and we increased their offensive and defensive numbers by an additional 10% this season. The result of this improvement is one more win and a better than .500 record of 9-7. Unfortunately, even with improved numbers, the Texans are still forecast to finish 4th in the division and miss the playoffs. Like we said to begin with, we feel a little sorry for the Texans.

Room for improvement:

If the Texans could improve their offense by 27% again this year, the computer algorithm has them at 12-4. Is this reasonable? Given that it would take a 47% improvement to get to the Patriot numbers of 2007, it doesn't sound unreasonable. So, we will go with that as an upside. The additional wins would come from games at the Titans, Vikings and Browns.

How they could falter:

This isn't hard to imagine. As we have said several times before, the AFC South is as tough as it gets. So, should the Texans backtrack instead of progress, the bottom falls out for them. A projected record of 4-12 is the result of a 10% retracement in offense and defense.

The five additional losses would come in home games with the Colts, Bengals, Titans and Jaguars as well as a road game with the Raiders. We've said there is a fine line between winning and losing in the NFL, and the small adjustments that make the Texans swing from a 12-4 to 4-12 record drives this point home. This is why there is always one or two teams that surprise their fans in a good way and one or two that surprise their fans in a really bad way.

Biggest Question Marks:

We are going to go with the Coach here. We know Kubiak has a fine offensive mind and has had success building the offense of the Texans. Will he be able to also make improvements in the defense this year and keep the team positive in the tough AFC South? This may be the toughest question we've posed, and quite frankly, we don't have a good guess. We think Kubiak will be able to improve the defense and keep the team positive despite its most likely 4th place finish in the division which makes them miss the playoffs, but we don't know. We made positive adjustments because we believe he will be able to accomplish this, but if the Texans have a 9-7 record or better, they have had a very successful season in our view.

Schedule projection: 9 – 7

Texans	Opponent	Field	Preview
Week 1	Steelers	Away	L
Week 2	Ravens	Home	W
Week 3	Titans	Away	L
Week 4	Jaguars	Away	L
Week 5	Colts	Home	W
Week 6	Dolphins	Home	W
Week 7	Lions	Home	W
Week 8	BYE	BYE	x
Week 9	Vikings	Away	L
Week 10	Bengals	Home	W
Week 11	Colts	Away	L
Week 12	Browns	Away	L
Week 13	Jaguars	Home	W
Week 14	Packers	Away	L
Week 15	Titans	Home	W
Week 16	Raiders	Away	W
Week 17	Bears	Home	W

AFC West – Chargers

Summary:

The Chargers started 2007 slowly and had many people wondering if Norv Turner was going to be as successful as Marty Schottenheimer had been in 2006. While their eventual 11-5 record helped them win their division, their painstakingly slow start cost them any hope of being near their 14-2 mark of 2006. Their PossessionPoints numbers also reflected their struggles with their offensive performance down 23% in 2007. While Philip Rivers has another year of maturity and experience under his belt and everyone's top Fantasy back LaDainian Tomlinson appears to be 100%, we kept the Chargers' offensive numbers unchanged from their 2007 level. The Chargers first-round draft pick, Antoine Cason, seems to be a good Cornerback but look for him on Special Teams. He will be behind Cromartie and Jammer (great name for a Cornerback) on defense. Honestly, we didn't see anything to make us tweak their defensive numbers up; in fact, we lowered them slightly by 5%. Even still, the computer matchups have the Chargers going 13-3 in 2008 which is two games better than last year. As we worked through our various team adjustments, we could not find a single run where the Chargers didn't win the West.

Room for improvement:

There is almost always room for improvement, and our computer tells us all the Chargers need to do is repeat their 2007 PossessionPoints performance and they should win 14 games. The two games still in the loss column would be Week 8's road game with the Saints and Week 11's road game with the Steelers. That seems pretty reasonable for an upside, but we're sure Chargers' fans might even argue the Saints game as we would expect Patriots' fans to argue with week 6. Should the best case scenario occur, San Diego would most likely be looking at a first-round playoff bye and perhaps even home field advantage.

How they could falter:

It would probably take a major injury to LT or maybe Rivers or a rash of injuries to the team to derail the 2008 Chargers, but these things sometimes happen in the NFL. So, what is the downside? We took a vicious cut and reduced their offense and defense by 25%, and the Chargers still came up as a 7-9 team. Perhaps only the Patriots could experience that much of a fall off and still be within 1 game of .500. The 6 added losses in this dark scenario would be at the Raiders, Chiefs, Bucs and Bills and home games with the Patriots and Colts.

Biggest Question Marks:

On paper there are no real question marks. Last year, they won 2 playoff games so the playoff performance questions seem to be gone. The only real question is will the Patriots and Steelers play up to their potential, and if they do, can the Chargers get by them? Our matchup has them losing a very close playoff game with the Steelers (a fraction of a PossessionPoints difference), but we could easily see the Chargers in the Super Bowl and perhaps winning it this season.

Schedule projection: 13 – 3

Chargers	Opponent	Field	Preview
Week 1	Panthers	Home	W
Week 2	Broncos	Away	L
Week 3	Jets	Home	W
Week 4	Raiders	Away	W
Week 5	Dolphins	Away	W
Week 6	Patriots	Home	W
Week 7	Bills	Away	W
Week 8	Saints	Away	L
Week 9	BYE	BYE	x
Week 10	Chiefs	Home	W
Week 11	Steelers	Away	L
Week 12	Colts	Home	W
Week 13	Falcons	Home	W
Week 14	Raiders	Home	W
Week 15	Chiefs	Away	W
Week 16	Bucs	Away	W
Week 17	Broncos	Home	W

AFC West – Broncos

Summary:

The Broncos had their problems last season and their 7-9 record in 2007 reflects that. From a PossessionPoints standpoint the Broncos' performance fell considerably: they were 16th in offense and 30th in defense. They retreated 3% on offense but a whopping 39% on defense. Looking at the Broncos' offseason we think their moves will have more of an effect on the offense than the defense. So we added 15% to the offense and 5 % to the defense. The result was a middle of the road 8-8 record.

Room for improvement:

There is plenty of room for improvement, but remember we had already adjusted their offense up 15% and defense 5%. When we took the defense up to +20% they picked up 4 more wins and went to a projection of 12-4. Broncos' fans will get an idea early because 2 of the new wins come in the first 4 games. The games at Oakland and KC could be the bellwether for how the season goes. However, if they start out 2-2, look for a .500 season. On the upside, the other two new wins would come in the later season games at the Jets and Panthers.

How they could falter:

If we leave the Broncos and rest of the league unadjusted, Denver projects to a 6-10 record. Once again, the Broncos fans won't be held in suspense because the games that flip to the L column are weeks 2 and 3 which are home games against the Chargers and Saints. So Broncos' fans, should your team start the season 0-4, look for a sub-.500 season but not necessarily a hopeless one since you could still end up with 6 wins. This is better than many of the "falter" scenarios we've seen for other teams.

Biggest Question Marks:

The Broncos have lost wide receivers Jevon Walker (now at Oakland) and Rod Smith (retired). The primary wide receivers now appear to be a couple of Brandons: Marshall and Stokley - both of whom were with Denver last year. Will Jay Cutler be able to continue his improvement as an NFL QB or will 2008 be a backslide for the third-year Quarterback and Receivers? Under Mike Shanahan, The Broncos are generally a run-heavy team, but they do look for big pass plays to keep defenses honest. We expect the same in 2008, so we think Jay and company will continue to improve. That's why we increased their offensive performance by 15% in making our projections.

Schedule projection: 8 – 8

Broncos	Opponent	Field	Preview
Week 1	Raiders	Away	L
Week 2	Chargers	Home	W
Week 3	Saints	Home	W
Week 4	Chiefs	Away	L
Week 5	Bucs	Home	W
Week 6	Jaguars	Home	L
Week 7	Patriots	Away	L
Week 8	BYE	BYE	x
Week 9	Dolphins	Home	W
Week 10	Browns	Away	L
Week 11	Falcons	Away	W
Week 12	Raiders	Home	W
Week 13	Jets	Away	L
Week 14	Chiefs	Home	W
Week 15	Panthers	Away	L
Week 16	Bills	Home	W
Week 17	Chargers	Away	L

AFC West – Raiders

Summary:

In 2007, The Raiders made gigantic strides improving their PossessionPoints offensive performance an incredible 132% over their dismal 2006 numbers. Raiders' fans, we think this is reason to celebrate and proves that big changes can come in one season. We admit that we would never be so bold to adjust any team's numbers up that much, but the Raiders did it all on their own, and this season we see a brighter future ahead for this team. Although their defensive PossessionPoints numbers did not move up so dramatically in 2007, the Raiders did move up into the top half of the PossessionPoints chart ranking 13th - an improvement of five places from 2006. For this season, we adjusted the Raiders up just 5% on offense and left their defense unchanged. The drafting of premiere Running Back of Darren McFadden accounts this adjustment. This offensive adjustment produced a projected "Yellow" 7-9 record. While the Raiders are 3rd in their division by our projections, their potential is certainly better than the last two years and provides reason for optimism in Oakland.

Room for improvement:

On the upside, we see an amazing 12-4 projection for the Raiders if McFadden's contribution can cause Oakland's offensive production to increase by 25%. Again, this is a tall order, but it's nothing like the 132% Oakland had accomplished last year. So, we deem this doable. The Raiders' fans will take their cue from the Week 3 game at Buffalo. This is the first projected L on the Raiders' schedule that this best case scenario would turn to a W. Other potential wins include the games at the Ravens, Broncos and Bucs and home against the Texans. Should this best case scenario occur, it will be Lane Kiffin up for Coach of the Year at the ripe old age of 33.

How they could falter:

It all comes down to the offense in Oakland. If McFadden's contribution is not as significant and the Raiders' offense retraces by 25%, our projections fall off to 4-12 which is the same as their 2007 record. The good news here is most likely Oakland will improve! In the worst case scenario situation, the early warning signs would be a Week 2 loss at Kansas City. From there, the Raiders' forecast does not really change until Week 11 at the Dolphins and Week 13's home game against the Chiefs which would both turn into an L for the Raiders.

Schedule projection: 7 – 9

Raiders	Opponent	Field	Preview
Week 1	Broncos	Home	W
Week 2	Chiefs	Away	W
Week 3	Bills	Away	L
Week 4	Chargers	Home	L
Week 5	BYE	BYE	x
Week 6	Saints	Away	L
Week 7	Jets	Home	W
Week 8	Ravens	Away	L
Week 9	Falcons	Home	W
Week 10	Panthers	Home	W
Week 11	Dolphins	Away	W
Week 12	Broncos	Away	L
Week 13	Chiefs	Home	W
Week 14	Chargers	Away	L
Week 15	Patriots	Home	L
Week 16	Texans	Home	L
Week 17	Bucs	Away	L

Biggest Question Marks:

Will top draft choice Darren McFadden join last year's top pick JaMarcus Russell to produce the superstar tandem that the Raiders are hoping for? We truly believe that these two players can become the Dynamic Duo this team needs. If our projection of 7-9 is wrong this season, we fully expect that the win total is too low.

AFC West –Chiefs

Summary:

Dear Herm (Edwards): You have your work cut out for you this year. Unfortunately, our projections put the Chiefs as one of the AFC teams in the “Red”, which means we view it as highly unlikely that we will see the Chiefs in the playoffs. The adjustments we see for the Chiefs were not enough to offset what other teams in the league were doing. The end result is a woeful 3-13 projection. We realize you are in a major overhaul of your team as evidenced by your off-season moves that gave you 12 picks in the 7 rounds of the draft. Hopefully, your youth movement helps - it often does. But such resurgence often takes a year or two to kick in, and we think this season may be the “darkest before the dawn” in KC. We’ll be keeping track of your progress, and we’ll alert our PossessionPoints faithful as soon as we see signs of things turning around. Don’t worry, our stat will let us know, it always does.

Room for improvement:

Naturally, there is plenty of room for improvement on a 3-13 forecast. Where should we begin? Let’s assume that rookie Glenn Dorsey shores up the defense and they improve by 15%. Then let’s say Larry Johnson and the offense get their act together, and they improve by 10%. Does that help? You bet it does, and it is another case of the “fine line” between good and bad teams. The projection rockets to an incredible 11-5. We would be most surprised if this were to occur as that would most likely land the Chiefs in the playoffs. Chiefs’ fans will be able to take the pulse on the season after the first 4 weeks. We expect they will be 1-3, but the best case scenario has them 3-1, beating the Raiders at home and the Falcons on the road. They would then win their next 4 games, at the Panthers and Jets and home against the Titans and Bucs. The parties would be kicking up in KC and Herm would be the toast of the town not to mention Coach of the Year were that to happen.

How they could falter:

Not much room to falter. Perhaps the home wins against the Broncos and Bills are in jeopardy, but we don’t expect the 2008 Chiefs to be quite as bad as the 2007 Dolphins.

Biggest Question Marks:

The class of 08. Can the baby Chiefs have an immediate impact? We really like the first 4 picks: Dorsey, Brandon Albert, Brandon Flowers and running back Jamaal Charles. Will the other 8 be able to have a positive influence? We expect it will be a year or two out, but we do like what we are seeing from the start of their rebuilding process.

Schedule projection: 3 – 13

Chiefs	Opponent	Field	Preview
Week 1	Patriots	Away	L
Week 2	Raiders	Home	L
Week 3	Falcons	Away	L
Week 4	Broncos	Home	W
Week 5	Panthers	Away	L
Week 6	BYE	BYE	x
Week 7	Titans	Home	L
Week 8	Jets	Away	L
Week 9	Bucs	Home	L
Week 10	Chargers	Away	L
Week 11	Saints	Home	L
Week 12	Bills	Home	W
Week 13	Raiders	Away	L
Week 14	Broncos	Away	L
Week 15	Chargers	Home	L
Week 16	Dolphins	Home	W
Week 17	Bengals	Away	L

NFC East – Eagles

Summary:

Last year, PossessionPoints.com took a lot of heat in our backyard of Philadelphia when we projected a 9-7 season for the Eagles. We just shrugged our shoulders and said, "It's not what we want to happen, but it is what the computer told us." Guess what, The Eagles went 8-8 and missed the playoffs. This year, we want to categorically state that we did not rig the numbers to appease the tough Philadelphia fans as the computer is forecasting that Eagles will win the NFC East with a projected record of 12-4. This projection was based on us making just a 5% improvement on their offensive numbers and no change on their defensive numbers. We base their offensive improvement on the anticipation that Donovan McNabb's knee will be 100 % and the injuries that have plagued his career will not pose a threat. We realize it's a lot to hope for, but McNabb is a tough guy, so we'll go with it.

Room for improvement:

Believe it or not there is definite room for improvement. To underscore that we did not rig the results, we are going to chat about the unadjusted numbers both from the Eagles' point of view and the rest of the league. Were the Eagles to play their 2008 schedule with their 2007 PossessionPoints performance numbers, the computer projected they would walk away with the division with a 13-3 record – the additional W coming in Week 11 at the Bengals,

How they could falter:

We hate to even utter these words, so let's invoke knocking on wood, fingers crossed or any other superstition you like before we say, Brian Westbrook getting injured could produce the Eagles worst case numbers. To simulate this, we took their offensive performance down 25%. This yielded a record the same as 2007's 8-8. Losses would come from home games with the Steelers, Cowboys and Giants and the road game at Seattle. It seems to us that the Eagles should have a better 2008 season than their 2007 season.

Biggest Question Marks:

Can Donovan McNabb stay healthy for a full season? It has been a while since this franchise player has been 100% for the Eagles. When that occurred the Eagles tiptoed into the Super Bowl. Another question mark: will their Wide Receivers be adequate enough to keep defenses from keying on Brian Westbrook. While we don't believe the Eagles' Wide Receivers are great by any means, we do think they are good enough to at least keep NFL defenses honest.

Schedule projection: 12- 4

Eagles	Opponent	Field	Preview
Week 1	Rams	Home	W
Week 2	Cowboys	Away	L
Week 3	Steelers	Home	W
Week 4	Bears	Away	W
Week 5	Redskins	Home	W
Week 6	49ers	Away	W
Week 7	BYE	BYE	x
Week 8	Falcons	Home	W
Week 9	Seahawks	Away	W
Week 10	Giants	Home	W
Week 11	Bengals	Away	L
Week 12	Ravens	Away	W
Week 13	Cardinals	Home	W
Week 14	Giants	Away	L
Week 15	Browns	Home	W
Week 16	Redskins	Away	L
Week 17	Cowboys	Home	W

NFC East – Cowboys

Summary:

The Cowboys were a very good PossessionPoints team in 2007 finishing the season 5th in offense and 14th in defense. Their PossessionPoints Net numbers ranked them a playoff worthy 4th place in the NFL. This season, the schedule makers put more roadblocks in the way of the Cowboys. Even though we adjusted their defense up 5%, the computer produced a second-place division 11-5 record. On paper, Dallas with QB Tony Romo, WR Terrell Owens and RB Marion Barber appear to be an offensive powerhouse, and they were just that in 2007. So, with that talent still in place and operating at peak performance last year, we saw no reason to readjust the numbers up.

Room for improvement:

The Cowboys would appear to have most room for improvement on their defensive performance. Were we to adjust that by 15% instead of 5%, this change would produce a division-winning 14-2 record. Dallas fans will know right away which way their team is headed with their opening game at Cleveland which we have forecast as the Cowboys first loss of the season. If they turn that projected L into a W, the projections would then have the Cowboys starting the season at 8-0. That kind of start could certainly build the confidence that can produce a 14-2 season. The only losses left on their schedule would be Week 9 at the Giants and Week 14 at the Steelers.

How they could falter:

Should the injury bug strike the Cowboys, and their offensive performance falls off by 20%, their projected record plummets to 8-8 which is short for a playoff bid and may well turn into a last place finish in the division. While a Week 1 loss is forecast anyway and shouldn't give off any alarms, a Week 2 home loss against the Eagles and a Week 3 road loss against the Packers, should send shivers through the city of Dallas as this would prove to be the miserable path to mediocrity that all Dallas fears. The only additional loss we see in this scenario is a Week 6 loss at the Cardinals. While an 8-8 record is not horrible, it is not the record that is going to get the Cowboys to the Super Bowl as many predict.

Biggest Question Marks:

Will Adam Jones, who no longer wants to be called Pacman, be able to leave his troubled past behind and perform up to the level of his talents? If Jones can attain this, he could be the pivotal piece in the Cowboys' defense that propels the team to the best case scenario 14-2 record and perhaps a spot at the Super Bowl

Schedule projection: 11- 5

Cowboys	Opponent	Field	Preview
Week 1	Browns	Away	L
Week 2	Eagles	Home	W
Week 3	Packers	Away	W
Week 4	Redskins	Home	W
Week 5	Bengals	Home	W
Week 6	Cardinals	Away	W
Week 7	Rams	Away	W
Week 8	Bucs	Home	W
Week 9	Giants	Away	L
Week 10	BYE	BYE	x
Week 11	Redskins	Away	L
Week 12	49ers	Home	W
Week 13	Seahawks	Home	W
Week 14	Steelers	Away	L
Week 15	Giants	Home	W
Week 16	Ravens	Home	W
Week 17	Eagles	Away	L

NFC East – Giants

Summary:

Last year's Super Bowl winners are being disrespected by our computers, and we don't like it. Our numbers forecast NY to finish 3rd in the division with a record of 10-6. In fairness to the computer, they were 10-6 last season, and they didn't win the division. We even adjusted the Giants' offensive performance up 12% because of the way Eli Manning finished the season and proved to be the high-caliber Quarterback that the Giants believed he was when they traded for him on draft day.

Room for improvement:

Since we have already improved the Giants' offense 12%, we would look for defensive improvements to match. Adjusting the Giants' defense up 15% would have the Giants winning the division with a 13-3 record. Never say never as how many saw the Giants' run to the Super Bowl occurring last season? The three additional wins from this adjustment would come in the games at the Browns, Redskins and Vikings. Improving their defense is risky after the retirement of Michael Strahan and the loss of Safety Gibril Wilson to Oakland. What these scenarios do show is that at least three teams in the NFC have the capability to win the division.

How they could falter:

The trade of Jeremy Shockey to the Saints might result in a negative impact; however, the loss of Shockey to an injury last season appeared to have the opposite effect. So, the effect of his absence remains a mystery. A negative adjustment of 10% on their offensive numbers produced a sub .500, 7-9 record. The funny thing is that the Giants' fans would be clueless as to the problems facing their team as we don't see a difference in the forecast until Week 9's home game against the Cowboys. This loss plus a road loss at the Cardinals and home loss to the Eagles is what produces the unfortunate 7-9 record.

Biggest Question Marks:

Will Safety Sammy Knight or rookie first-round draft pick Kenny Phillips be able to fill the shoes left by the departing Wilson? We certainly hope so because we would hate to think of the Giants' as a one-year wonder. Kenny Phillips was thought of by many as the best Safety in the draft, and hopefully, he proves to be just that for the Giants.

Schedule projection: 10 – 6

Giants	Opponent	Field	Preview
Week 1	Redskins	Home	W
Week 2	Rams	Away	W
Week 3	Bengals	Home	W
Week 4	BYE	BYE	x
Week 5	Seahawks	Home	W
Week 6	Browns	Away	L
Week 7	49ers	Home	W
Week 8	Steelers	Away	L
Week 9	Cowboys	Home	W
Week 10	Eagles	Away	L
Week 11	Ravens	Home	W
Week 12	Cardinals	Away	W
Week 13	Redskins	Away	L
Week 14	Eagles	Home	W
Week 15	Cowboys	Away	L
Week 16	Panthers	Home	W
Week 17	Vikings	Away	L

NFC East – Redskins

Summary:

The Redskins round out the powerhouse NFC East, and although our projections have them 4th in the division, the computer still projects for them a better than .500, 9-7 record. In reality in 2007, Washington was just an average PossessionPoints team with a 9-7 record despite making the playoffs. They were 15th in offense and 17th in defense according to PossessionPoints standards. The Redskins made efforts to improve their defense with the acquisition of “Star Dancer” and Defensive End Jason Taylor from the Miami Dolphins this preseason. They also used their three, second-round draft picks on offensive players taking two Wide Receivers and a Tight End. Optimistically, we adjusted the Redskins’ offense up 10% and their defense up 5%. Despite those adjustments, they still have a projected finish of 9-7.

Room for improvement:

Much like the other teams in the NFC East, if the Redskins surprise us and improve 20% both on offense and defense, they could find themselves atop the NFC East come January. The computer started us with a top projected finish of 14-2 having the Redskins only lose in Weeks 4 and 5 in the games at the Cowboys and Eagles. While we think this scenario unlikely, the adjustments were not so outlandish that these results are not credible.

How they could falter:

If instead, the Redskins suffer from the dreaded injury bug and their performance goes down 10% on offense and defense, their record falls to a miserable 3-13. Unlike the other teams in the NFC East, the Redskins appear to have much more downside risk. That to us reinforces the 4th place projection. For early signs of trouble, Redskins’ fans should look to the Week 2 and 3 home games against the Saints and Cardinals. The worst case scenario switches those wins to Losses. Later season losses would come at the Lions and home against the NFC rivals Cowboys, Giants and Eagles.

Biggest Question Marks:

Rookie Coach Jim Zorn: He was interviewed for the Offensive Coordinator job at the Redskins and wound up being offered the Big Job. Is he ready for the jump from the QB Coach’s position at Seattle to Head Coach in Washington? That is a two-level jump which may require more than one season to master. Job seekers all around the country are wondering “What did he say on that interview to land this job?” We don’t know, but we’re sure he’ll write a book someday or go on the Inspirational Speech Circuit and tell us all. In the meantime, he has his work cut out for him in the very tough NFC East.

Schedule projection: 9 – 7

Redskins	Opponent	Field	Preview
Week 1	Giants	Away	L
Week 2	Saints	Home	W
Week 3	Cardinals	Home	W
Week 4	Cowboys	Away	L
Week 5	Eagles	Away	L
Week 6	Rams	Home	W
Week 7	Browns	Home	W
Week 8	Lions	Away	W
Week 9	Steelers	Home	L
Week 10	BYE	BYE	x
Week 11	Cowboys	Home	W
Week 12	Seahawks	Away	L
Week 13	Giants	Home	W
Week 14	Ravens	Away	L
Week 15	Bengals	Away	L
Week 16	Eagles	Home	W
Week 17	49ers	Away	W

NFC South – Saints

Summary:

It's a good thing for the Saints that computers are not emotional and don't hold grudges. Last season, the computer projected the Saints would win the division; however, somewhere between the projections and opening day, the Saints forgot how to play football. This year, the computer is giving the Saints another chance. PossessionPoints projections have the New Orleans re-gaining the NFC South crown with a 13-3 record. Last year, the Saints' offensive performance tumbled by 6% while their defense took a 32% plunge. This season, we see Reggie Bush coming into his own and the addition of Jeremy Shockey at Tight End prompted us to up the Saints' offense 10%. Despite the fall off in defense last season, we left the Saints' defense unadjusted and will let the chips fall where they may. Somewhat to our surprise, the computer chips landed with a 13-3 record. Amazingly enough, we believe this will not only power them to the NFC Division crown, but they are our pick for the team to face off the Patriots in the Super Bowl.

Room for improvement:

No real room to improve on a projected 13-3 season. The unadjusted sheet also came up at 13-3, but adjusting the defense up just 10% did produce an astonishing 15-1 projection. In this case, the only loss on their schedule is Week 2 at the Redskins. Once again, it is interesting to note that even with a 13-3 record, we expect the Saints to start 1-2 in their first three games. Their schedule gets much easier in the final $\frac{3}{4}$ of the season.

How they could falter:

Jeremy Shockey turns out to be more of a burden than a blessing. True, he is going back to Sean Payton, his former Offensive Coordinator, but he is in a new town with teammates who are not used to his boisterous behavior. Let's assume the Saints' offense falters by 20% as a result. This produces a playoff missing 7-9 record which was identical to 2007's season. Unfortunately for Saints' fans, you won't know that you were diverted from our original projection of 13-3 until Week 8 and the home game against the Chargers. The road gets rocky in the latter part of the season with losses at Kansas City, Tampa Bay, Chicago and Detroit along with a home loss to the Packers.

Biggest Question Marks:

We alluded to it earlier – Jeremy Shockey – blessing or blight. Jeremy did have the appearance of the ME-first mentality last season in NY. His injury may well have been a good thing for the Giants. However, in this case, we think he might have humbled a little and that coupled with the leadership influence of Payton, will make Shockey a major benefit for the Saints.

Schedule projection: 13 – 3

Saints	Opponent	Field	Preview
Week 1	Bucs	Home	W
Week 2	Redskins	Away	L
Week 3	Broncos	Away	L
Week 4	49ers	Home	W
Week 5	Vikings	Home	W
Week 6	Raiders	Home	W
Week 7	Panthers	Away	L
Week 8	Chargers	Home	W
Week 9	BYE	BYE	x
Week 10	Falcons	Away	W
Week 11	Chiefs	Away	W
Week 12	Packers	Home	W
Week 13	Bucs	Away	W
Week 14	Falcons	Home	W
Week 15	Bears	Away	W
Week 16	Lions	Away	W
Week 17	Panthers	Home	W

NFC South – Panthers

Summary:

The Panthers were a mediocre-at-best team in 2007 with a 7-9 record that ranked 21st in PossessionPoints offense and 24th in defense. The Panthers went to work on their offense with 2, first-round picks getting Offensive Lineman Jeff Otah and Running Back Jonathan Stewart. These acquisitions coupled with Jake Delhomme's surgically repaired elbow prompted us to increment the Panther's offensive numbers by 10%. We raised their defensive numbers by 10% as well. Despite these positive adjustments, the computer only sees fit to give them a 9-7 record.

Room for improvement:

It's hard to find further improvement since we already adjusted the Panthers up 10% on both offense and defense. But what the heck. Let's have some fun. Let's assume their offense improves by 20% and their defense by just 10%. These new adjustments produce two more wins and puts them directly in the playoff hunt if not in a chase for the Division crown with the Saints. The additional wins would come in Weeks 3 and 6 when the Panthers visit the Vikings and Bucs.

How they could falter:

Let's assume they don't get the 10% improvement in offense and defense. In the unchanged case, their record falls to 7-9. While some teams seem to have a wide variation as we change their performance, the Panthers appear to be in a tight range between 7 and 11 wins. The two additional losses in the worst case scenario would come in Weeks 7 and 8, the home games against the Cardinals and Saints.

Biggest Question Marks:

Will Jake Delhomme's elbow stand up to the wear and tear of a 16-week NFL season? Sorry, medical projections are beyond our expertise. The Panthers seem comfortable with Delhomme, so we are working on the assumption that he will be fine.

Schedule projection: 9–7

Panthers	Opponent	Field	Preview
Week 1	Chargers	Away	L
Week 2	Bears	Home	W
Week 3	Vikings	Away	L
Week 4	Falcons	Home	W
Week 5	Chiefs	Home	W
Week 6	Bucs	Away	L
Week 7	Saints	Home	W
Week 8	Cardinals	Home	W
Week 9	BYE	BYE	x
Week 10	Raiders	Away	L
Week 11	Lions	Home	W
Week 12	Falcons	Away	W
Week 13	Packers	Away	L
Week 14	Bucs	Home	W
Week 15	Broncos	Home	W
Week 16	Giants	Away	L
Week 17	Saints	Away	L

NFC South – Buccaneers

Summary:

Sorry, Buccaneers' Fans, but despite winning your division last season and making the playoffs with a 9-7 record, your PossessionPoints performance was not impressive. The Bucs ranked 25th in offense and were really carried by their defense which was ranked 11th. For no particular reason except for another year under veteran Coach Jon Gruden, we improved their offense and defense by 5%. The computer didn't find that adjustment impressive enough and spat back at us a 7-9 record and third place in the division.

Room for improvement:

If we were to improve the Bucs' offense and defense by 20%, then Tampa Bay not only become contenders but Division Champs as well with a 14-2 record. We see this as a stretch, but we have also seen Jeff Garcia pull rabbits out of a hat. This would leave their schedule with only two losses at the Saints on opening day and at Dallas in Week 8.

How they could falter:

If one or two key players gets hurt and the Bucs' offensive and defensive performances retreat by 10%, their projected record tumbles all the way down to 3-13. This plummet shows a rather wide range in contrast with the tight range that our variations produced on the Panthers. Interestingly enough, the 3 wins would be the two games against the Falcons and the home game against the Panthers.

Biggest Question Marks:

It's all about the QB in this league and since the Bucs showed they have questions at that position by flirting with the idea of picking up Favre – so do we. Will they try to make another trade or will Jeff Garcia be the man and can he deliver? While we think Garcia is solid and reliable, we do not think he can propel the Bucs to the playoffs again this year especially if the Saints perform up to their capabilities. We are pretty comfortable with the computer projections of 7-9.

Schedule projection: 7 – 9

Bucs	Opponent	Field	Preview
Week 1	Saints	Away	L
Week 2	Falcons	Home	W
Week 3	Bears	Away	L
Week 4	Packers	Home	W
Week 5	Broncos	Away	L
Week 6	Panthers	Home	W
Week 7	Seahawks	Home	W
Week 8	Cowboys	Away	L
Week 9	Chiefs	Away	W
Week 10	BYE	BYE	x
Week 11	Vikings	Home	L
Week 12	Lions	Away	L
Week 13	Saints	Home	L
Week 14	Panthers	Away	L
Week 15	Falcons	Away	W
Week 16	Chargers	Home	L
Week 17	Raiders	Home	W

NFC South – Falcons

Summary:

We are sorry Atlanta, but this is a team buried in “Red”. The computer could find little to like about the Falcons. Last season, the Falcons’ offensive PossessionPoints performance only fell by 5% with the loss of Michael Vick. Their defensive performance fell by 20%. To show you how low the Falcons’ offense truly was, they would have needed a 151% improvement to equal the Patriots’ performance. Taking that into consideration, we could not believe that the Falcons’ offense would remain that far at the bottom. So, we cranked it up 25%, one of our biggest adjustments ever. It didn’t help. The computer still came in with just 2 wins. We wish first year Coach Mike Smith the best of luck and a full season. There is nowhere to go from here but up.

Room for improvement:

Tons or Room for everyone to improve! Let’s go wild and assume that Matt Ryan is the Second Coming of Tom Brady. With this in mind, we cranked up their offensive PossessionPoints performance by 50%. That major adjustment produced 7 whole wins - count them – 7!. Those additional wins would come in home games against the Lions, Bears, Broncos, Panthers and Bucs. Is this a credible adjustment? Most likely not, but Falcons’ fans deserve to hope for an upside of 7 wins. They have suffered enough.

How they could falter:

Well, unless they get lost on the way to the stadium or leave all their equipment at the airport, we don’t see how much worse it could be. In all seriousness, all we had to do is crank their defense down 10%, and the computer erased all wins for Atlanta. Sorry Falcon Fans, it looks like a grim year, but as Atlanta rose from the ashes way back when, so will your Falcons. Everyone is optimistic in August.

Biggest Question Marks:

Will the Coach last the whole year? More importantly, will he turn the reins of the offense over to rookie QB Matt Ryan or stick with one of the journeyman veterans they have on the squad. Given our projections, we vote to go with the kid from Boston College. The only potential liability with this move is hurting Ryan’s confidence. Anything better than 2-14 is a success. He might be the person to bring this team around.

Schedule projection: 2 – 14

Falcons	Opponent	Field	Preview
Week 1	Lions	Home	L
Week 2	Bucs	Away	L
Week 3	Chiefs	Home	W
Week 4	Panthers	Away	L
Week 5	Packers	Away	L
Week 6	Bears	Home	L
Week 7	BYE	BYE	x
Week 8	Eagles	Away	L
Week 9	Raiders	Away	L
Week 10	Saints	Home	L
Week 11	Broncos	Home	L
Week 12	Panthers	Home	L
Week 13	Chargers	Away	L
Week 14	Saints	Away	L
Week 15	Bucs	Home	L
Week 16	Vikings	Away	L
Week 17	Rams	Home	W

NFC North – Vikings

Summary:

Sorry Packer fans, but after we adjusted the Packers for the loss of Favre, the computer produced the Vikings as the top team in the NFC North. Like many divisions this year, this is not cast in stone as you will see from our “Room for Improvement” and “How They Could Falter” sections in the various team write-ups. We looked at the Vikings and their premiere Running Back Adrian Peterson and adjusted their offense up 15%. On the defensive side of the ball, Minnesota added Pro-bowl quality Defensive End Jared Allen. The Vikings essentially traded away their best draft picks this year to get him, but we like the move so we bumped their defense 10%. Many teams, who have received this much of a positive adjustment would produce outstanding records, but the Vikings project a 9-7 record, that is just one game over .500. Do not be surprised, NFC North fans, if that record does win this division.

Room for improvement:

Let’s assume that the Vikings somehow move up 20% on offense and defense. This major adjustment would give Minnesota a 13-3 record. The 4 additional wins would come early in the season with a home game against the Colts in Week 2 and road games with the Titans and Saints. The other win would come in the Week 14 road game with the Lions.

How they could falter:

Our forecast, which you see to the right, yields a final record of 9-7 and also has the Vikings going 1-4 in the first 5 games. We are big believers in confidence and emotion and their impact on the game of football. A 1-4 start could set this team on a roller coaster ride that might scar some of the not-as-experienced Vikings. To gauge this possibility, we looked to the unadjusted sheet which showed the Vikings going 6-10 for the season. Yes, the start is still 1-4, and it doesn’t get much better as they would lose in Week 7 at the Bears, Week 11 at the Bucs and their home game in Week 10 with the Packers.

Biggest Question Marks:

Quarter Back, Quarter Back, Quarter Back. Any team rumored to be thinking about Brett Favre in July has questions about their own QB. And while all our projections were done prior to the preseason, all of our write-ups were not. We could feel the Vikings’ fans cringe as Tarvaris Jackson rolled from the pocket and took a shot to the knee that ended, hopefully only his night. As of this writing, the Vikings say the injury is only a bruise, but the thoughts of going the season with backup veteran Gus Frerotte will make even the toughest Minnesota fan shiver with fear.

Schedule projection: 9 – 7

Vikings	Opponent	Field	Preview
Week 1	Packers	Away	L
Week 2	Colts	Home	L
Week 3	Panthers	Home	W
Week 4	Titans	Away	L
Week 5	Saints	Away	L
Week 6	Lions	Home	W
Week 7	Bears	Away	W
Week 8	BYE	BYE	x
Week 9	Texans	Home	W
Week 10	Packers	Home	W
Week 11	Bucs	Away	W
Week 12	Jaguars	Away	L
Week 13	Bears	Home	W
Week 14	Lions	Away	L
Week 15	Cardinals	Away	L
Week 16	Falcons	Home	W
Week 17	Giants	Home	W

NFC North – Packers

Summary:

When the Packers and Fans emerge from the Favre mourning period, they will have to embrace an untested Aaron Rodgers at the helm of their beloved team. The Packers' management must think highly of Rodgers because they had the opportunity to welcome Favre back with open arms and have him play another season in Green Bay. As much as we hope for Rodgers' success, we adjusted the Packers' offense down 10% to account for the loss of Favre and to account for the fact that 2007 was the third best season in Favre's career. We also made a minor adjustment downward of 5% in their defense projections only because we feel the defense will have to be on the field more than they were last season. The end result is the 7-9 second place finish in the division. Certainly, the Packers will have a shot to overtake Minnesota and claim the division title.

Room for improvement:

Lots of room! The Packers need only perform as well as they did in 2007 under Favre to wind up with an NFC best - 15-1 record! In this scenario, their only loss would be in Week 15 at the Jaguars. Is it a stretch to think that the 2008 Packers under Rodgers could perform as well as the 2007 Packers under Favre? Maybe not. If the coaching staff and management are right in their assessment of Rodgers, who knows what this young QB is capable of. If Rodgers were to prove to be an invaluable asset, we would not be surprised to see the Packers make a run for the Division or maybe find a way into the Super Bowl even though our official projection has them colored "Yellow" not "Green".

How they could falter:

The Packers' projections are already pretty close to what we see is rock bottom for 2008. When we looked at the offense possibly retracing further by 25% and their defense by 15%, their win-loss record only went down one game to a record of 6-10. That additional loss comes in Week 16 against the Bears.

Biggest Question Marks:

Once again, the QB poses the biggest question. Will Rodgers be a capable replacement, equal replacement or exceptional replacement for Brett Favre? We don't know, but we think it's an awful lot to expect an NFL Quarterback with limited game experience to come in and perform like the Hall-of-Fame Quarterback he is replacing. Our human memories can only recall one time when this has occurred: the replacement of Joe Montana with Steve Young in San Francisco. Who knows maybe Rodgers will be the next Steve Young.

Schedule projection: 7 – 9

Packers	Opponent	Field	Preview
Week 1	Vikings	Home	W
Week 2	Lions	Away	L
Week 3	Cowboys	Home	L
Week 4	Bucs	Away	L
Week 5	Falcons	Home	W
Week 6	Seahawks	Away	L
Week 7	Colts	Home	L
Week 8	BYE	BYE	x
Week 9	Titans	Away	L
Week 10	Vikings	Away	L
Week 11	Bears	Home	W
Week 12	Saints	Away	L
Week 13	Panthers	Home	W
Week 14	Texans	Home	W
Week 15	Jaguars	Away	L
Week 16	Bears	Away	W
Week 17	Lions	Home	W

NFC North – Lions

Summary:

Oops, the schedule maker did it again! Remember, last season when the Lions started out 6-2, and Detroit fans had dreams of the Super Bowl dancing in their heads, and then reality set in and Detroit finished the season 7-9 with not even a playoff game in sight? Don't let this memory fade because this season, the computer projection has the Lions winning their first 4 games. Unfortunately, the same computer only has Detroit winning 2 of their remaining 12 games for an eventual record of 6-10. This projected record is despite the fact that we think Wide Receiver Calvin Johnson could emerge as a top 5 Receiver in the league this season. So, we adjusted the Lions' offense up a tremendous 25%. We adjusted the defense up 5% to account for the improved offense.

Room for improvement:

Improvement seems to be all about the defense this year in Detroit. We left the offense at its +25% believing that is as good as it could possibly get and moved the defense up 15%. The result is a surprisingly good 12-4 projection and a playoff bid. The 6 additional wins would come in games at the Vikings, Bears and Panthers and home games with the Redskins, Titans and Saints. Is there room for such improvement? You bet. The 2007 Patriots were 99% better on offense than the 2007 Lions, and the leading PossessionPoints defense, the Eagles, were 31% better than Detroit's defense last season. So, a 25% and a 15% improvement is not an unattainable number.

How they could falter:

If we are wrong about their improvement potential and they just perform as they did in 2007, the projections fall to 3-13. Lions' fans will know early because instead of the 4-0 start we have forecasted, Detroit would fall to a 2-2 start with losses coming home against the Packers and on the road with the 49ers. The other loss would come later in the season when they play the Vikings at home.

Biggest Question Marks:

Our biggest question marks revolve around the development of Calvin Johnson and the improvement of the defense. We think that the Kitna-to-Johnson combination might prove deadly this year to opponents' offenses. While we are less certain of the defense, we still have hope for improvement. Detroit is another team that has a wide range of possibilities for their season. They are projected to be a "Yellow" team, and we wouldn't argue with that.

Schedule projection: 6 – 10

Lions	Opponent	Field	Preview
Week 1	Falcons	Away	W
Week 2	Packers	Home	W
Week 3	49ers	Away	W
Week 4	BYE	BYE	x
Week 5	Bears	Home	W
Week 6	Vikings	Away	L
Week 7	Texans	Away	L
Week 8	Redskins	Home	L
Week 9	Bears	Away	L
Week 10	Jaguars	Home	L
Week 11	Panthers	Away	L
Week 12	Bucs	Home	W
Week 13	Titans	Home	L
Week 14	Vikings	Home	W
Week 15	Colts	Away	L
Week 16	Saints	Home	L
Week 17	Packers	Away	L

NFC North – Bears

Summary:

We hate coloring teams “Red”, but sorry Bears’ fans, this year, “Red” falls all over your team. With uncertainty at Quarterback and an anemic running attack last year, we saw no bright lights that would cause us to adjust the Bears’ offense up. However, on defense we did adjust the Bears’ numbers up 15% to recapture a little bit of the 41% loss that the Bears’ defense had in 2007. Unfortunately, this hike was still not enough and the Bears’ record projection is a dismal 3-13.

Room for improvement:

Let’s assume that Devon Hester can bring his running magic to the offense and develop into a top-flight Wide Receiver or at least a good target. If we take the Bears’ offense up 15% matching the 15% increase in defense we already made, the Bears’ projected record jumps up to 9-7. This could put Chicago in contention to be a surprise team in the playoffs. However, it would be a big surprise. In this best case scenario, the Bears would get their 6 additional wins on the road with the Panthers, Lions and Rams and in home games against the Vikings, Titans and Saints.

How they could falter:

We are going out on a limb with the Bears, but we don’t think they can go below 3-13. That pretty much bottoms them out. When we looked at the Bears’ schedule with no adjustments made, their record was actually 5-11. So, the Bears’ projection is hurt more by the anticipated improvement of their opponents than by their own performance. Chicago is the only team whose record we think is as low as it can possibly go.

Biggest Question Marks:

The biggest mystery in Chicago is who will be the Quarterback of the Bears? Perhaps, Chicago is fortunate in that they are playing in a very indecisive division where the biggest question for many of the teams is who will be Quarterback? While Lovie Smith continues to flip his preseason coin trying to decide whether Grossman or Orton will earn the starting spot, we will sit back and wait - not expecting much performance difference from either contender.

Schedule projection: 3 – 13

Bears	Opponent	Field	Preview
Week 1	Colts	Away	L
Week 2	Panthers	Away	L
Week 3	Bucs	Home	W
Week 4	Eagles	Home	L
Week 5	Lions	Away	L
Week 6	Falcons	Away	W
Week 7	Vikings	Home	L
Week 8	BYE	BYE	x
Week 9	Lions	Home	W
Week 10	Titans	Home	L
Week 11	Packers	Away	L
Week 12	Rams	Away	L
Week 13	Vikings	Away	L
Week 14	Jaguars	Home	L
Week 15	Saints	Home	L
Week 16	Packers	Home	L
Week 17	Texans	Away	L

NFC West – Seahawks

Summary:

The decision has been made and Mike Holmgren calls it quits in Seattle after this season. Will this year be a super send-off or a silent slide out of town? Our projection is that the Seahawks will have a good season, but they will also face major challenges that might upset their supremacy in their division. We project that the Seahawks and Cardinals will end with a 9-7 record, which means the division title will be won in a tiebreaker. So, it will be an interesting final year for the Holmgren era and Seattle fans. We adjusted Seattle's offense up 10% and left the defense unchanged. The Seahawks did cut Running Back Shaun Alexander, but they also picked up Julius Jones from Dallas whose production should be better than that of Alexander who suffered numerous injuries in the last few years.

Room for improvement:

What would happen if we pumped up the Seahawks' defense 10% to match the offensive improvement? Our projections then give Seattle a 12-4 record which would solidify their division title, and maybe get them a first-round bye in the playoffs. Seahawks' fans could get an indication early about the fate of their team when they face the Buffalo Bills in Buffalo in Week 1. Our official projection has the Seahawks losing, but this best case scenario would have them posting a win. The other two games that would convert from the loss to the win column would be the home game with the Eagles and the away game with the Bucs.

How they could falter:

The Seahawks are one of those teams whose fate doesn't drastically change with the adjustment numbers. When we adjusted their offense down 10% instead of up 10%, their record only fell to 8-8. The bad news is that the win that would become a loss is the home game with the Cardinals in Week 11. If they were to lose to the Cardinals, most likely the division would go to Arizona. We don't believe an 8-8 record would be good enough to get the Seahawks a wildcard bid this year.

Biggest Question Marks:

Is Holmgren's heart really in the game this season? While Holmgren believes he can bring his A-coaching game, you would have to delve into his sub-conscious to know for sure. So often, when athletes and coaches make the decision to quit before the season begins, their sub-conscious looks forward to the end, and the extra effort that might have been there is unintentionally left aside. Those of us not in the professional sports world, know this phenomenon as "Senioritis". It's human nature but we don't know whether it will affect Holmgren or not. We will all know in January.

Schedule projection: 9 – 7

Seahawks	Opponent	Field	Preview
Week 1	Bills	Away	L
Week 2	49ers	Home	W
Week 3	Rams	Home	W
Week 4	BYE	BYE	x
Week 5	Giants	Away	L
Week 6	Packers	Home	W
Week 7	Bucs	Away	L
Week 8	49ers	Away	W
Week 9	Eagles	Home	L
Week 10	Dolphins	Away	W
Week 11	Cardinals	Home	W
Week 12	Redskins	Home	W
Week 13	Cowboys	Away	L
Week 14	Patriots	Home	L
Week 15	Rams	Away	W
Week 16	Jets	Home	W
Week 17	Cardinals	Away	L

NFC West – Cardinals

Summary:

Hey, hey, hey Cardinal fans, this could be your year! We are sure you have heard this before, and all the world is optimistic in August, but this year, we truly think you have reason to be optimistic. This season, the Cardinals possess a mature Matt Leinart plus top-flight Wide Receivers Anquan Boldin and Larry Fitzgerald and Running Back Edgerrin James. Since these players are all veterans of the Cardinals' squad, we felt there was no need to adjust their offensive numbers and in fact, we took them down 5%. While the Cardinals addressed defensive needs in the draft and free agency, they also lost Calvin Pace from last year's team. Because of these changes, we chose not to adjust Arizona's defensive numbers in either direction. The result is a 9-7 record and a division tie with the Seahawks.

Room for improvement:

Believe it or not there is lots of room. Just looking at the totally unadjusted numbers which is only 5% different than the changes we did make to the Cardinals, the computer matchups have the Cardinals walking away with their division with a stellar 12-4 record. The additional wins would come in home games with the Cowboys and Giants and on the road with the Panthers. It sounds like a lot to hope for, but the computer surprised us in the past, and we are not going to argue with it here.

How they could falter:

It takes a lot to make the Cardinals' season turn south of our projections. Even a drop of 15% on both offense and defense yielded a .500, 8-8 record. That is only one game different from our official projections. The loss would come (this may sound familiar to anyone who just read the Seahawks write-up) with the home game against the Seahawks. Anyone realize the significance of this game yet? It could be a biggie

Biggest Question Marks:

We keep harping on this point, but the question focuses on the Quarterback situation. We are in the camp of those who really like the talents of Matt Leinart, and we believe he can lead the Cardinals to great things. There is a good comfort zone with the QB waiting in the wings: veteran Kurt Warner. While we have questions like everyone else on who would be the best starter, we think no matter who the Cardinals play, they should be fine. We would not be the least bit surprised to see the Cardinals win the division and do well in the playoffs.

Schedule projection: 9 – 7

Cardinals	Opponent	Field	Preview
Week 1	49ers	Away	W
Week 2	Dolphins	Home	W
Week 3	Redskins	Away	L
Week 4	Jets	Away	W
Week 5	Bills	Home	W
Week 6	Cowboys	Home	L
Week 7	BYE	BYE	x
Week 8	Panthers	Away	L
Week 9	Rams	Away	W
Week 10	49ers	Home	W
Week 11	Seahawks	Away	L
Week 12	Giants	Home	L
Week 13	Eagles	Away	L
Week 14	Rams	Home	W
Week 15	Vikings	Home	W
Week 16	Patriots	Away	L
Week 17	Seahawks	Home	W

NFC West – Rams

Summary:

It doesn't look like a good year in St. Louis. About the only positive thing we can say is that no matter how bad it looks in St. Louis, it is worse in San Francisco. The Rams had a terrible fall off in performance in 2007 with their offensive numbers diving 34% and their defensive numbers down 19%. We think that this was not reflective of the capabilities of the Rams, so to compensate for that, we adjusted both their offensive and defensive numbers up 15%. Even with this large adjustment, the computer did not like the Rams' schedule and spat out a 4-12 resulting record which is solidly in the PossessionPoints "Red" zone. It appears the Rams have a lot of work ahead of them, and the preseason holdout of star Running Back, Steven Jackson, is not helping matters.

Room for improvement:

It would take a lot to improve the Rams' results, but if we were to adjust the Rams' offensive and defensive numbers further up to 25%, the Rams manage to get to .500 with a record of 8-8. Rams' fans won't know they are on this track because all of the four additional wins come in the second half of the season. The optimistic scenario has the Rams starting the season 1-7 and finishing 7-1. You may find this strange, but this scenario has occurred on several occasions in the NFL in recent years. This type of turnaround underscores the point that the Rams' schedule is far tougher in the first half than in the second half.

How they could falter:

We need only look at the unadjusted computer run to see the Rams have a 2-14 projection. In this pessimistic scenario, they win just 2 home games against the Dolphins and 49ers.

Biggest Question Marks:

Will the Rams sign Steven Jackson in time for the start of the season? As of this writing, the impasse between the Rams' management and Jackson seems significant, and it appears he might not be in a Rams' uniform on opening day. We can always hope that this is one of those situations where behind-the-scenes negotiations will yield a positive result and Jackson will return to his teammates. Should the holdout continue and Jackson returns mid-season, there may be many who see a late-season win spurt by the Rams as proof of Jackson's talent. However, our best and worst case scenarios that we painted above show that schedule - and not Jackson - may have more to do with the late season surge of the Rams.

Schedule projection: 4 – 12

Rams	Opponent	Field	Preview
Week 1	Eagles	Away	L
Week 2	Giants	Home	L
Week 3	Seahawks	Away	L
Week 4	Bills	Home	W
Week 5	BYE	BYE	x
Week 6	Redskins	Away	L
Week 7	Cowboys	Home	L
Week 8	Patriots	Away	L
Week 9	Cardinals	Home	L
Week 10	Jets	Away	L
Week 11	49ers	Away	L
Week 12	Bears	Home	W
Week 13	Dolphins	Home	W
Week 14	Cardinals	Away	L
Week 15	Seahawks	Home	L
Week 16	49ers	Home	W
Week 17	Falcons	Away	L

NFC West – 49ers

Summary:

More “Red” in the West. The 49ers had their offensive and defensive units go in different directions last year. Their offensive performance declined by 30% while their defense improved by 11% from 2006. Given how far from the pack the Niners’ offense is, we adjusted it up 10%. While their defense was ranked a respectable 19th according to PossessionPoints, we still saw fit to adjust it up 5% for 2008. Even with these positive adjustments, the computer matchups could only find 2 wins on the schedule for San Francisco.

Room for improvement:

Obviously, there is a lot of room for the 49ers to improve. Were we to take their offensive and defensive numbers up by 20%, we would see the Niners attain an 8-8 record. The new wins would come from home games with the Lions, Seahawks and Redskins and away games at the Bills, Dolphins and Rams. Eight wins is a fair amount of upside from a 2-win projection, and should the published projection be wrong, we are almost certain it would wrong on the low side meaning the 49ers will more than likely win more games than 2. Similar to the Rams, most of the wins in the optimistic scenario occur in the second half of the season. The Niners would start the season off 2-6 and finish the last 8 games, 6-2. This could be a very interesting year in the NFL with teams looking completely different in the first and second halves.

How they could falter:

You are kidding right? Two wins – how much worse can it get? On a positive note, we need to take the 49ers’ offensive numbers down a whopping 20% to make the 2-wins turn into just 1-win – that being the home game with the Rams in Week 11.

Biggest Question Marks:

As with the other teams that are not forecasted to do well this season, the Rams have an uncertain Quarterback situation. Will the opening day QB be fourth-year pro, Alex Smith, or sixth-year pro, JT O’Sullivan, or perhaps seventh-year man, Shaun Hill. Much of the NFL world expects Alex Smith to take the reins, but so far in early preseason games, O’Sullivan has looked best. So, as of now, we just don’t know. Uncertainty at Quarterback is one of the surest paths to the bottom half of the standings. Unfortunately for 49er fans, we see questions lingering no matter which QB is named the starter.

Schedule projection: 2 – 14

49ers	Opponent	Field	Preview
Week 1	Cardinals	Home	L
Week 2	Seahawks	Away	L
Week 3	Lions	Home	L
Week 4	Saints	Away	L
Week 5	Patriots	Home	L
Week 6	Eagles	Home	L
Week 7	Giants	Away	L
Week 8	Seahawks	Home	L
Week 9	BYE	BYE	x
Week 10	Cardinals	Away	L
Week 11	Rams	Home	W
Week 12	Cowboys	Away	L
Week 13	Bills	Away	L
Week 14	Jets	Home	W
Week 15	Dolphins	Away	L
Week 16	Rams	Away	L
Week 17	Redskins	Home	L