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NFL 75th Anniversary Season Begins with no Baseball

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SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR H-ARETE
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Over the past several years it has been called the No Fun League. Now in its 75th anniversary year it could be that the fun is returning to the NFL.

So three weeks into the season with 22 quarterbacks having changed teams in the off season, and the salary cap wreaking havoc on some rosters, it might be a good time to take a look at the NFL with its new rules and new look.

Usually rule changes come and go without having any great impact on the field of play. But this time it may be different. The arrival of the radio receiver in the helmet of the quarterback seems to have speeded things up.

There may also be fewer field goals and more teams going for the first down in fourth down situations from outside the thirty yard line. This resulting from the fact that after a miss the ball goes back to the placement position rather than the line of scrimmage. Certainly a team going for it on fourth down is more exciting than a field goal attempt.

Excitement has also been added with the two point conversion. Several teams have used it already and it has generally added to the drama of the fourth quarter. Also of interest is the fact that the kickoff is now from the thirty yard line. It appeared in the first two weeks that this was going to greatly increase the number of kick returns and that is always an exciting play. But this past weekend it appears that the kickers have adjusted, as more and more balls sailed into the end zone.

Of greatest significance have been the pass blocking changes, line-play, and pass defending. The rule changes in these areas have been especially important by increasing the passing attacks, which in turn opens up the running game. All in all it has increased excitement offensively. However, be warned, this may not last. Defensive coordinators have shown a great ability to catch up to rule changes very rapidly so the fireworks may be short lived.

These changes have been one of the reasons why the pre-season announcements of Dan Marino's death may have been premature. Marino has put on a tremendous display and with improved defense the Dolphins have opened with three straight wins. The first Miami game of the season against New England was the first really excellent game I've seen during the regular season in

quite some time. The display of firepower by Drew Bledsoe and Dan Marino was impressive, the two-point conversion came into play, kick-off returns were back, and fourth down conversion attempts rather than field goals were all a part of this game and one produced a Marino touchdown pass.

Another big surprise in the new season has been the San Diego Chargers with their 3-0 start including an impressive win over the Denver Broncos, who themselves have been a surprise of another kind. For the first time in recent memory the Broncos are 0-3 out of the gate, and Wade Phillips may be the leading candidate to be the first coaching casualty of the season.

Another interesting development has been the disappointing showing of Buddy Ball for the former Chicago Cardinals, St. Louis Cardinals, Phoenix Cardinals, and now the Arizona Cardinals, whose new name came as a big surprise. Obviously I had not kept up with the news coming off the desert. Buddy Ryan has taken his mouth out to the clear dry air where his remarks about fellow coaches can rip through the atmosphere with special electricity. So far though Buddy Ball has been a bust as the Arizona Cardinals are 0-3 and were hammered by Cleveland this past Sunday, 32-0.

And did anyone notice that the quarterback leading the 32 point Browns was none other than Vinne Testeverde? Late of the Tampa Bay Buccaneers. Ah Yes! The Bucs are still the Bucs, the one true source of stability in a changing universe. At 1-2 it would appear that Craig Erickson is losing altitude rapidly and the power of the Curse of Doug Williams has not dissipated. That Testeverde has turned into a decent quarterback after leaving Tampa can only add another chapter to the story of failure by the Bay. How long will Sam Wyche survive and when will Erickson find himself on the pines preparing to move on to a decent career elsewhere? Ah the Bucs! Our one certainly in life, our true north.

Another excellent early season game saw San Francisco in Kansas City with Joe Montana taking on his former teammates. It was one of those games of folkmyth and ritual, a terrific game, which added a bit more to the Montana mystique.

It may be that the NFL has been revived with more offense and more fun. Or is it just that there is no baseball, and way too much beach volleyball?

On Sport and Society this is Dick Crepeau reminding you that you don't have to be a good sport to be a bad loser.

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