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**Mid-Season NL Playoff Predictions**

**By Jay Nault**

As we round into the second half of the 2006 season, many fans begin to look ahead in hopes that their team can either catch fire or hold their lead and qualify for the postseason. In the National League, it appears that the postseason picture is beginning to take shape. One team is all but cemented in its place, another has history on its side and the rest have different factors in their favor that will aid in their quest to play into October.

NL East Winner:

New York Mets

Why they'll win the division: In short, the Mets will win the division because they've simply dominated it so far in 2006. As of this writing, they hold a 12-game lead on the second-place Phillies and they're not showing any signs of slowing down. They have very good pitching, timely hitting and a team "chasing" them that isn't showing many signs of life. The only word of caution that needs to be heeded by the Mets is that sometimes teams that "coast" into the postseason can be surprised in the first round of the playoffs, especially if they meet a team that's been battling to qualify. Regardless, the Mets have time to worry about that possibility.

NL Central Winner:

St. Louis Cardinals

Why they'll win the division: The Cardinals are going to win the NL Central for a few reasons. First, they have the best team, and in a 162-game season, there are very few anomalies that can play above their heads for that long. Second, they're getting hot at the right time, winning seven in a row as of this writing, while their "competition," the Reds, continue to fade after a hot start. The Cardinals also have slightly better pitching and hitting than their divisional competition. The Cardinals won't clinch too early, but they will clinch.

NL West Winner:

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### San Diego Padres

Why they'll win the division: The Padres not only have history on their side, but they'll also be pushed throughout the season. The Padres have never failed to qualify for the postseason after leading the division at the All Star break, which is where they are in 2006. They also play in a mediocre division where no team is a threat to go off on a tear in the second half. However, their lead is slim, and the Dodgers will remain within striking distance through the rest of the season, forcing the Padres to keep the pedal to the metal through the last week of the season.

### Wild Card:

### Los Angeles Dodgers

Why they'll win the Wild Card race: The Dodgers will qualify for the postseason more because of what their competition doesn't have than what the Dodgers bring to the table. The Reds, who currently lead in the Wild Card standings, have a tough second-half schedule and lack the consistent pitching needed to hold their lead. The Phillies, Brewers and Astros are too inconsistent and/or inexperienced in general to mount serious challenges, and the Dodgers will continue to press the Padres for the NL West crown as that division will remain competitive throughout the season.

This is how things should shape up in 2006, and the next time we revisit this subject, we'll analyze how the rest of the postseason will unfold.

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### **The NFL Needs a New Tie-Breaker**

**By Terry Mitchell**

### **The NFL Needs a New Tie-Breaker by Terry Mitchell**

After enduring that disgusting final weekend of the NFL season, I have come to the conclusion that a new tie-breaker is needed. How a team performs during the final weekend should be the first tie-breaker, with all the current tie-breakers falling in line after that. A team that won its final game

## Mid-Season NI Playoff Predictions

would hold the first tie-breaker advantage against a team they're tied with that lost its final game. If they both lost, both won, or both tied their final game, then the current tie-breakers would take effect in the order that they currently exist. That would accomplish at least three of positive things.

First, a team with a one game lead for a playoff spot, headed into the final weekend, would have more difficulty "backing in" to the playoffs the way Minnesota did this year. By all rights, New Orleans should have made the playoffs instead of the Vikings. They finished with identical records. However, the Saints won their final game, while the Vikings lost theirs. In fact, under the NFL's current crazy tie-breaker system, the Vikings' loss, while ultimately not damaging their own playoff hopes, ironically was one of the major factors that kept the Saints out of the playoffs! Under my proposed rule, the Saints would have been in and the Vikings would have been out.

Second, it would keep more playoff berths/positions open going into the final weekend and maintain more excitement and suspense all the way to the end. Currently, a team with a one game lead for a playoff berth, bye, home field advantage, and/or seeding can have that position clinched before the final weekend if they own the tie-breaker over the team(s) they lead. Under my proposal, that would not be possible. That position would still be open through the final weekend of the season. For example, the Pittsburgh Steelers would not have clinched the home field advantage in the AFC until they beat Buffalo in the final weekend, instead of having it already clinched going into that game.

Third, it would also keep teams with one game leads from having de-facto "byes" during the final weekend. Take Indianapolis for example. The Colts' game against Denver this weekend was meaningless to them, even though it meant everything to the Broncos. Although the Colts had only a one game lead over San Diego for the number three seed in the AFC, they owned the tie-breaker over the Chargers. I don't care what anyone says, the Colts, with their lack of effort, effectively rolled over and allowed the Broncos to win, which wasn't fair to Jacksonville and Baltimore, the teams competing with the Broncos for the final AFC playoff spot. Under my proposal, the Colts would have had to win to maintain their third seed in the playoffs.

Terry Mitchell is a software engineer, freelance writer, and trivia buff from Hopewell, VA. He also serves as a political columnist for American Daily and operates his own website – <http://www.commenterry.com> – on which he posts commentaries on various subjects such as politics, technology, religion, health and well-being, personal finance, and sports. His commentaries offer a unique point of view that is not often found in mainstream media.



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