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DOG DAYS OF DOMINANCE

THREE WEEKS IN, THREE WINS, AND THE MUD DOGS LOOK BUILT FOR ANOTHER CHAMPIONSHIP CLIMB.

BY JENNIFER RAE



Through three weeks, the narrative threads in Gridiron Gold are already tangled—quarterbacks falling, rivals jawing, and contenders emerging. But one story rises above the rest: the Appalachian Mud Dogs, the last undefeated team in the league, standing alone at 3–0 after a methodical dismantling of the Travelers.

It wasn't just that they won, it's how. Bo Nix managed the game with efficiency, putting up 13.42 fantasy points on the back of a 153-yard passing day and 33 rushing yards. But this offense didn't need heroics from its quarterback. It was the weapons around him—James Cook with 23.80, Puka Nacua exploding for 25.80, and Mark Andrews reminding everyone of his elite status with 27.10—that made the difference. Even without CeeDee Lamb, who was injured early in his game leaving a zero in the

box score, the Mud Dogs never broke stride. The result: a 139.62–87.06 win, a third straight victory, and sole possession of first place in the Lombardi Division.

The significance runs deeper than the standings. At the start of Week 3, three teams carried perfect records: The Wrecking Crew, 1024 Bandits, and the Mud Dogs. By Sunday night, only Jesse Glaspell's squad was left unbeaten. The 2023 champions had reclaimed the spotlight.

For Joe Riddle, the Mud Dogs' unapologetic Media Relations Director, the parallels to 2023 weren't just convenient, they were deliberate. "We've been here before," Riddle said, his voice steady. "In 2023, nobody wanted to admit we were the class of the division until it was too late. We proved them wrong then, and we're proving them wrong now. If you're asking me whether this feels like another run to a championship, you bet it does."

That confidence feels earned, but the road ahead isn't simple. The Mud Dogs will see the Travelers again in Week 4, an unusual scheduling quirk that looks more like a tune-up than a test. But beyond that, the division tightens. Fins In Low Places, sitting at 2–1 with the league's highest point total, loom as a real threat. They've got a young, explosive roster led by Jared Goff, Jonathan Taylor, and Marvin Harrison Jr.

If history is any indication, the Lombardi Division doesn't just produce contenders, it produces champions. The last two league titles have come from this division, with the Mud Dogs themselves owning one of those titles. Making it three straight wouldn't just cement the division's dominance; it would put Glaspell's roster in rare company.

Of course, the looming question isn't whether the Mud Dogs are good. It's whether they're built to sustain dominance for 14 weeks in a league designed to punish predictability. Injuries lurk, waiver-wire gambles tilt seasons, and rivals have a way of peaking at the wrong time. Even so, the Mud Dogs' roster construction speaks to resilience. Their depth at running back—James Cook, Derrick Henry, and Travis Etienne Jr. all capable of RBI weeks—gives them a cushion few teams enjoy. And with Nacua proving his rookie year wasn't a fluke, Andrews anchoring the tight end slot, and Lamb expected to bounce back in three to four weeks, this is a lineup with multiple paths to victory.

The schedule will test that depth. After the Week 4 rematch with the Travelers, the Mud Dogs face Dragon Lady, who took down the previously unbeaten Wrecking Crew in Week 3, and later Fins In Low Places in what already feels like a must-watch rematch of their Week 1 showdown. Those games will say more about whether the Mud Dogs can finish where they started: at the top of the Lombardi, staring down another championship run.

For now, though, the league has to deal with an uncomfortable truth: the Mud Dogs aren't just 3-0, they're 3-0 with upside. They haven't had their perfect lineup week yet. They've left points on the bench, weathered a goose egg from Lamb, and cycled through quarterbacks while still emerging unscathed. In other words, this isn't their ceiling.

And Riddle made sure to remind everyone of that. "If this feels familiar, it should," he said, referring again to the 2023 title season. "We don't apologize for winning, and we don't apologize for expecting to keep winning. Lombardi titles, league titles, it all goes through us. That's the standard, and we don't run from it. We embrace it."

The Mud Dogs have the record. They have the pedigree. They have the division that breeds champions. Through three weeks, they've left little doubt: the climb back to the top isn't just possible, it's already happening.

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Mud Dogs Stay Perfect, Travelers Stay Perplexed

The Appalachian Mud Dogs didn't need perfection to stay perfect. In a week where **Bo Nix** sputtered to just 13.42 points and **CeeDee Lamb** was lost early to injury, the Mud Dogs leaned on **Puka Nacua's** 25.8 and **James Cook's** 23.8 to grind their way past the Travelers, 139.62–87.06. It wasn't pretty, but it was enough to make the Dogs the last undefeated team standing in Gridiron Gold.

The Travelers, meanwhile, continue to be their own worst enemy. With **Caleb Williams** dropping 29.12 from the bench and **Keenan Allen** posting 17.1, **Rudy Fabian's** squad left 46 potential points idling in reserve. Instead, the starters fell flat, and the record slipped to 0–3.

Bo Nix didn't shy away from his own struggles. "I've got to be better. Simple as that," the second year quarterback admitted, grateful that his teammates picked him up on an off day. "You can't put up that kind of line and expect to win in this league unless the guys around you step up—and they did."

On the other sideline, The Travelers' Media Relations Director, **Delilah Sandoval**, was asked if it was time to panic—or at least start burning up the waiver wire after another dud from the starters. Her response? Cool, cocky, and cutting: "Waivers don't win you championships. We'll figure it out. And let's not pretend any team in this league wants to play us once we do."

In the end, the Mud Dogs moved to 3–0 with the quiet resilience of a contender that knows it hasn't played its best ball yet. The Travelers dropped to 0–3, their would-be firepower stuck on the sidelines, their early season hype now smoldering under the weight of mismanagement. One team is chasing destiny, the other still searching for its identity.



Dragon Lady Burns Bright, Hands Wrecking Crew First Loss

For two weeks, The Wrecking Crew carried the aura of inevitability—undefeated, dangerous, and carrying the weight of a league-wide target. But in Week 3, they ran into a Dragon Lady roster that didn't just win, it roared. Behind breakout efforts from **Nico Collins** and rookie sensation **Jahmyr Gibbs**, Dragon Lady posted a commanding 151.32–99.78 victory, dealing the Crew their first loss of the season and shifting the balance of power in the Shula Division.

The Crew's undoing came early. With **Jayden Daniels** sidelined, **Michael Penix Jr.** was handed the keys to the offense, and he promptly drove it into a ditch, throwing two interceptions and finishing with a paltry 5.78 points. **Tucker Kraft**, battling a nagging injury, was a non-factor, and **Ja'Marr Chase** felt the full weight of the **Joe Burrow** fallout, managing just 8.90 points in an offense suddenly adrift without its leader. What had been the Crew's strength, the reliability of its stars, was reduced to shadows.

GM **Tony McGriff**, reflective but resigned, gave full credit to his opponent. "You can't look at what Nico Collins did, what Jahmyr Gibbs did, and call it anything but elite," he said. "We've got our own problems. Chase without Burrow, Daniels unavailable, Penix looking lost. But Dragon Lady played like a playoff team. This week was theirs."

His media director, **Deb Levi**, was more pointed. "Penix's performance wasn't just bad, it was unacceptable. One week doesn't define a player's career, but let's be clear: there will be discussions about his future with this team moving forward."

On the other sideline, it was all smiles. Gibbs turned in 26.90 points, dazzling as both a rusher and receiver, while Collins erupted for 25.40 on 104 yards and a touchdown. Together, they provided the kind of one-two punch that leaves opponents reeling. "It's games like this that show we belong," Gibbs said, his grin as wide as his stat line. "This team has the talent to make noise, and now people are starting to believe it too."

With the win, Dragon Lady climbs to 2–1, establishing themselves as a serious Shula Division contender. The Wrecking Crew, now 2–1, find themselves asking hard questions about quarterback depth, their reliance on Chase, and whether the early aura of invincibility was smoke and mirrors.

For now, one truth is clear: the fire-breathing performance from Dragon Lady has reset the division narrative. The Crew may still be dangerous, but they're no longer untouchable.



McCaffrey Assembles, Thomas Jr. Disassembles

In the Shula Division, the Avengers Team lived up to their cinematic namesake—powered by a superhero performance from **Christian McCaffrey** and backed by a helpful second from **DK Metcalf**. McCaffrey's 24 points were the Captain America shield this team needed, holding the line with balance, power, and precision.

But every great team has its weak link, and for the Avengers, that role once again belonged to **Brian Thomas Jr.** With only 7.5 points, his repeated struggles are starting to look less like growing pains and more like Loki slipping out of formation—unpredictable and costly. “We’re optimistic about Brian,” said **Lauren Beltran**, the Avengers’ Media Relations Director.

For DBarber, the fight was valiant but incomplete. **A.J. Brown** finally exploded like Thor’s hammer crashing down, dropping 25.9 points and single-handedly dragging the offense forward. The **Eagles defense** played the role of Iron Man’s suit—sturdy, creative, and impactful—with 13 points that kept the matchup closer than expected. **Tyreek Hill**, though quiet by his standards, still chipped in to keep things afloat.

Yet the cracks were too deep. **Jordan Love** misfired like Hawkeye without his arrows, totaling just 12 points, while **Romeo Doubs** fell flat at a meager 2.5. **Jose Vargas**, DBarber’s Media Relations Director, pulled no punches: “We’re happy with Tyreek and A.J., no question. But Love and Doubs? Not good enough. We need everyone showing up every week, not just a couple guys. Consistency wins in this league.”

When the dust settled, the Avengers Team walked away with a 114.8–98 victory. The Marvel metaphors are fitting: McCaffrey and Metcalf assembled to save the day, but the looming question remains—can the rest of the roster play their parts, or will Thomas Jr. continue to play the villain in their script?



Hobbton Hands Bandits First Loss in Statement Win

The Gibbs Division has never lacked drama, but Week 3 delivered a reversal that shook the standings. The 1024 Bandits, one of three undefeated squads heading into the week, stumbled against a fired-up Hobbton team, 125.62 to 100.30.

For Hobbton, the formula was simple: let their stars cook. **Josh Allen** (23.02) looked sharp, **Jaxon Smith-Njigba** (20.60) finally played like the weapon he was drafted to be, and **Jordan Mason** came out of nowhere with a breakout 26.60-point eruption that put the exclamation mark on the victory. Add in minor contributions from **Rashid Shaheed** and **Breece Hall**, and suddenly Hobbton looked every bit like the contender they've been promising to be.

The Bandits, meanwhile, didn't exactly roll over. **Amon-Ra St. Brown** carried the load with 20.70, and **Justin Herbert** did his best to keep things respectable with 18.60. But **Zay Flowers** and **Deebo Samuel** fizzled, leaving **Juliano Wild's** squad chasing points it never could quite catch.

Still, it wasn't the on-field play that grabbed headlines afterward. Instead it was the off-field fireworks. Hobbton's Media Relations Director **Sam King** was quick to trumpet the team's dominance, crowing about the division running through them after this win. But that chest-thumping drew a cutting, dismissive response from the Bandits' own mouthpiece.

DeAndre Bell, the Bandits' Media Relations Director, didn't just reject King's bravado — he laughed it off, literally. "You want to talk dominance? Don't make me laugh—oh wait, too late!" Bell said, nearly in hysterics. "Hobbton's out here thumping their chest after one win, but let's not forget just last week they got their asses kicked. Dem Wallz didn't just beat them, they skull drug them. That was a world-class beatdown, the kind you don't recover from overnight. And we handled Dem Wallz without breaking a sweat. So, forgive me if I don't buy into this little fairytale about Hobbton suddenly being a powerhouse."

With Hobbton now sitting at 2-1 and the Bandits dropping to 2-1, the Gibbs Division picture is getting muddier — and meaner — by the week.



Bad Guys Finally Break Through

The Bad Guys came into Week 3 carrying the burden of bad luck—two straight 130+ point performances, two straight losses. This time, though, fortune finally tilted their way, as they knocked off Dem Wallz 120.26–85.52 in a matchup that spoke volumes about timing, resilience, and wasted opportunities.

For Dem Wallz, it was a bitter pill. Just a week ago, they looked dominant in their blowout of Hobbton. This week, however, the roster sputtered. **Lamar Jackson** delivered another strong performance (27.02 points), but his effort stood almost entirely alone. **Jameson Williams** and **Justin Jefferson** never found rhythm, **Kareem Hunt** and **Isiah Pacheco** failed to make a dent, and the rest of the supporting cast fizzled. It was a jarring reversal from a team that had shown flashes of playoff potential. After the game, Jackson didn't hide his frustration: "Last week we were flying high. This week? We flatlined. That's on us. We can't ride the rollercoaster if we want to get where we're trying to go."

The Bad Guys, meanwhile, exhaled at last. After suffering back-to-back heartbreakers despite putting up points, the win column finally came calling. Rookie back **Omarion Hampton** was electric, grinding out 24.90 points with tough runs and timely receptions. But the real surprise hero? Kicker **Chase McLaughlin**, who put up 21 points, his leg becoming the difference-maker on a day when style points didn't matter, only the victory.

Emeka Egbuka summed up the locker room mood perfectly: "Man, it feels like the monkey's off our back. We've been waiting for this. We knew we weren't an 0–2 team. Now we get to build."

Arthur Robinson, the team's Media Relations Director, was characteristically unflappable but already looking down the road: "This is the kind of win that can turn things around. We've been scoring, we've been competing. Now we've finally got the result. There's no reason to think we can't keep stacking wins from here."

For Dem Wallz, the loss highlighted the inconsistency that has haunted their playoff hopes in past seasons. For the Bad Guys, it might just be the turning point that redefines their season.

After two weeks of frustration, the Bad Guys are finally alive.



Fins Survive, Pud's Suffers Another Blow

In a matchup defined by missed opportunities and star players left stranded on the bench, Fins In Low Places held on for a narrow 108.22–102.04 victory over Pud's Playmakers. Both sides had reason to shake their heads after the final whistle, but for very different reasons.

Fins, the league's highest-scoring team, looked surprisingly mortal. While **Jonathan Taylor** ran wild with 35.8 points and **Trey McBride** chipped in a sturdy 15.3, the rest of the roster stumbled. **Tee Higgins**, once again caught in the fallout of **Joe Burrow's** season-ending injury, turned in a paltry 2.5 points. Higgins didn't hide his frustration afterward: "I'm happy we won, but I've got to contribute more than that. At the end of the day, I need a real quarterback throwing the ball if I'm gonna help this team."

Adding salt to the wound, **David Montgomery** sat on the Fins' bench with a monster 32.4 points, his absence nearly proving costly in what became a razor-thin finish.

For Pud's, the story was heartbreak of another kind. **Jalen Hurts** (29 points) and **Quentin Johnston** (14.9) kept them in it, but their margin for error was wiped away when **Mike Evans** exited with a hamstring injury. Evans, who will now miss several weeks, cut a disappointed figure: "This isn't how I wanted to help my team. Sitting out hurts more than the injury itself."

To make matters worse, **Cam Skattebo's** 24.1 points were wasted on the bench. His presence in the starting lineup might have flipped the outcome and delivered Pud's a much-needed win.

In the end, Fins In Low Places survived to move to 2–1, clinging to their identity as the league's offensive juggernaut despite a shaky week. Pud's Playmakers, now 1–2, find themselves searching for answers, and hoping Evans' absence doesn't derail their season before it truly begins.

Week 4 Preview: Separation Season Begins

Three weeks down, and the table's already splitting. Contenders are fighting to prove their dominance, middle-of-the-pack squads are clawing for credibility, and the winless are gasping for air. Week 4 isn't just about another notch in the win column—it's about momentum, survival, and bragging rights.

Game of the Week: The Wrecking Crew (2-1) vs. 1024 Bandits (2-1)

Two powerhouses collide in a matchup that could define the early season playoff race. The Wrecking Crew were humbled by Dragon Lady last week, but their roster is too talented to stay down for long. 1024 Bandits, once unbeaten, are coming off a stinging loss to Hobpton—and their media director DeAndre Bell hasn't stopped laughing at Hobpton's own inconsistency. Now Mario's squad has a chance to prove they're still the class of their division.

It's strength on strength: the Crew's upside-heavy roster against the Bandits' St. Brown-led attack. Whoever wins grabs a crucial tiebreaker that may loom large come playoff time.

Appalachian Mud Dogs (3-0) vs. Travelers (0-3)

The Mud Dogs look to stay perfect, and they couldn't have asked for a better setup. The Travelers are reeling, still searching for an identity, while Jesse's team is riding a championship-level balance. Another Mud Dogs win here might not only keep them undefeated—it might bury the Travelers for good.

Avengers Team (2-1) vs. The Bad Guys (1-2)

The Avengers are proving they can scrap like their namesake squad, led by McCaffrey's Captain America act. The Bad Guys finally broke through last week, with Omarion Hampton and Chase McLaughlin sparking life. If Emeka Egbuka and Davante Adams deliver, this could be the sneaky thriller of the week.

DBarber (0-3) vs. Fins In Low Places (2-1)

DBarber is spiraling, but AJ Brown and Tyreek Hill give them puncher's power every Sunday. The problem? Everything else. Fins are the league's highest-scoring juggernaut, even with Tee Higgins slumping. This could be another showcase for Jonathan Taylor, but Jose Vargas has made it clear—if Barber doesn't get full team buy-in soon, the season could be cooked before October.

Dem Wallz (1-2) vs. Dragon Lady (2-1)

This one's dripping with storylines. Dem Wallz are still hunting their first playoff berth and need consistency desperately, while Dragon Lady just dismantled the Wrecking Crew in a shocking reversal of fortunes. If Nico Collins and Gibbs stay hot, this could be another Dragon Lady show—but Lamar Jackson won't go quietly.

Hobpton (2-1) vs. Puds' Playmakers (1-2)

Sam King called last week's win "dominance," but DeAndre Bell reminded everyone that Dem Wallz once skull-dragged this very same Hobpton squad. The question is—are they real or riding momentum? Puds' Playmakers will test them, even with Mike Evans sidelined. Cam Skattebo's role looms large, especially after being wasted on the bench last week.