

THE SHADOW KNOWS: Week 17

Gary Davenport

It's Championship Week, so of course The Shadow Knows is kicking off this most important of weeks with a matchup that might not even happen.

That's how fantasy seasons go. You try your absolute best, you make it one win from the title—and then you get on bended knee to pray that Cincinnati Bengals wide receiver Ja'Marr Chase will play against the Kansas City Chiefs this week.

After missing last week's blowout loss to the Pittsburgh Steelers with a shoulder injury, Chase practiced Thursday. And given the shade he threw at cornerback L'Jarius Sneed and the Kansas City secondary when asked what's most formidable about it., he sounded an awful lot like a guy who's playing in Week 17.

"If I'm being honest, nothing," Chase said, via "Jungle Roar Pod." "They just know how to play us, they know the leverages, they know what splits we in, they just know what we gonna do certain movements. They throw little double-doubles at us to stop the two best players on the outside, and that's all they do. It's not really like they got a Jalen Ramsey on their squad. So, not much."

When asked by reporters about those comments after practice, Chase doubled down.

"I'm just adding fire to the fuel," he said. "They're going to take this, run with it. Hope they put it in their locker."

This could almost make up for missing another chapter of Marshon Lattimore vs. Mike Evans (sigh), but there's a problem—Sneed might not play after missing practice Wednesday and Thursday with a calf injury.

After topping 100 tackles last year (not a great sign for a cornerback), Sneed has blossomed into one of the NFL's better cover corners—his passer rating against of 54.7 is outstanding. He's shadowed many of the NFL's best receivers—and held his own. If he plays this week, the matchup between him and Chase will be fascinating. If he doesn't and Chase is anywhere close to 100 percent?

He's going to win y'all championships—or cost you them, depending on if you have him in the lineup or your opponent does.

That I'm in so many leagues I'm in both boats is...yeah.

Carolina Panthers at Jacksonville Jaguars (Donte Jackson vs. Calvin Ridley)

Hey. Want bigger names? Tell Jaire Alexander to stop crashing coin tosses.

What. The. Hell.

The Jacksonville Jaguars need a win almost as badly as I need a winning Powerball ticket (OK—I don't "need" it so much as want it. It's the same thing, really.). Ridley told reporters that regardless of the team's circumstances the key to making the playoffs is simple—do your job.

"Listen, I'm going to sit here and I'm going to back myself up when my back's against the wall or anybody," said Ridley. "I'm going to protect myself. I'm here with my teammates. We're going to be all right. I'm going to say that every time. That's me. I've been good at football for a while. But listen, I'm going to go out there and play. I'm not worried about who is on the field or not. I'm not worried about that. I'm going to go out and do what I got to do."

There are multiple issues for Ridley managers. Trevor Lawrence is iffy to play and might not be better with a bad shoulder than C.J. Beathard. Beathard apparently only has eyes for tight end Evan Engram (which is another matter altogether). And he's facing a sneaky-good Panthers defense that has given up the fourth-least PPR points to wideouts.

Atlanta Falcons at Chicago Bears (A.J. Terrell vs. D.J. Moore)

This is not a game that many NFL fans have circled as a must-watch. But from a fantasy perspective, it's one of the more intriguing matchups of the week. D.J. Moore has essentially been exactly what the Bears wanted him to be when they made him part of the trade for last year's No. 1 pick—the No. 1 receiver the team had lacked for some time. From his time with the Carolina Panthers, Moore is quite familiar with A.J. Terrell and the Falcons—and he told reporters he's looking forward to the challenge.

"They look familiar," Moore said. "They're going to come up and press you, be aggressive and just be like little gnats the whole game because they're not going to back off. So, it's going to be a challenge on the outside."

The Falcons might be a mediocre NFL team, but a pass defense featuring Terrell and Jessie Bates is anything but—eighth in the league in pass defense and 30th in PPR points given up to wide receivers. This isn't to say Moore isn't a start—that's not feasible. But odds are good that Moore comes in under his season average this week—and this ain't a good week to be below average.

Tampa Bay Buccaneers at New Orleans Saints (Chris Godwin vs. Paulson Adebo)

Mike Evans' managers should be doing handstands over Marshon Lattimore being out for the Saints—over their long and heated rivalry, the latter has won more battles than he's lost. But as the inestimable Mike Clay wrote at ESPN, Lattimore's absence hardly means that Evans and Godwin are going to run amok.

"This is a tough matchup for the Bucs," Clay wrote. "The Saints have allowed the eighth-fewest fantasy points to wide receivers this season. They are near mid-pack in WR targets faced but are allowing 7.2 yards per target (sixth lowest) and a 57% catch rate (third lowest) to the position. The key for the Saints has been domination of the perimeter, as they've allowed the second-fewest fantasy points to the boundary while playing about average against the slot."

That part about the slot provides some solace for Godwin managers, and obviously Evans is a go. But the Saints are no joke defensively—25th in PPR points allowed to wide receivers. It's Week 17. One week to decide it all. And all fantasy managers need now is for Baker Mayfield to overcome a bad matchup with pinpoint throws.

That's fantasy football. Go ahead and scream. It's OK.

Pittsburgh Steelers at Seattle Seahawks (Joey Porter Jr. vs. DK Metcalf)

That the name "Joey Porter" is now associated with a cornerback and coverage instead of terrorizing quarterbacks and a lot of stuff you'd get 15 yards for in 2023 is—man I feel old sometimes. But the younger Porter really isn't getting the credit he should be for the success he's had as a rookie—at a position where rookie success isn't all that common. Porter has quickly become Pittsburgh's No. 1 cornerback, but he told reporters he's been looking forward to facing DK Metcalf since well before he had that status.

"Every matchup I'm ready for," Porter said. "But this is the big one that everyone is talking about. I'm not going to lie; I've had it circled on my calendar. He's an aggressive guy, he gets physical, and he puts his hands on dudes. I'm excited about that. I've been looking for that. Everybody says I'm a physical guy, so I'm ready for that matchup."

Porter will cede size to Metcalf, because every cornerback does. But Porter is as physical (within the rules) a corner as he's faced all season long. Metcalf doesn't get downgraded this week—he's the same low-end WR1/high-end WR2 he's been all year. But this would have the makings of a potential Tyler Lockett game if anyone but Lockett remembered he was on the team.

Gary Davenport is a two-time Fantasy Sports Writers Association Football Writer of the Year, Follow him on Twitter at @IDPSharks