My Bid for 11-02-11

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The mysterious vanishing act that is Titans running back Chris Johnson continues to escape logic. How does the one-time fastest running back in the NFL change from a thoroughbred into a Clydesdale? Johnson has no burst, no acceleration – even on those rare occasions when he finds himself in space.

Cynics claim Johnson's wallet is slowing him down. I guess lugging $53.5 million around would get tiresome. Former Titans defensive tackle Albert Haynesworth took his money and ran. Johnson took his money and he can't run, at least the way he did two years ago.

Titans quarterback Matt Hasselbeck played at Seattle with former Alabama running back Shaun Alexander. Alexander was headed to the Pro Football Hall of Fame. He peaked in 2005 when he ran for 1,880 yards. The Seahawks rewarded him with an 8-year, $62 million contract. It was guaranteed for $15.1 million, and the team paid him $15 million in the first year of the new contract. At the time, it made Alexander the NFL's highest paid running back.

"I see a lot of similarity,'' Hasselbeck said Sunday. "Just in terms of when you're so successful and you produce in such a major way with Fantasy Football and all of that stuff and people are just expecting it to happen.''

Alexander broke his foot three weeks into the 2006 season. It began a decline that escalated when Alexander fractured a wrist and suffered a sprained knee and ankle in 2007. He was cut in April of 2008 and the Redskins cut him after four games and 11 carries that year and he was out of the league, just three years after having his best season.

"It's hard to be that elite all the time, so people got on him real quick, real easy,'' Hasselbeck said of Alexander. "He probably got a little too much credit when things were good and definitely got too much blame when things were bad.''

Fans at LP Field and those watching on flatscreens across the country see a different Chris Johnson. The boo-birds are in full throat. When asked, Johnson denies losing a step. He claims to be the same runner he was when he piled up 2,006 yards two seasons ago.

He averaged 125.4 yards a game in 2009. It dropped to 85.2 yards a game last season and is now averaging 43.1 yards a game -- 2.8 yards per carry. That, my friends, is pedestrian. That's a mule crashing the Kentucky Derby field.

Even if he came back out of shape, Johnson has had seven games to get his mojo back. He may be regressing, as the Colts came into the game ranked second to last in run defense. New Orleans piled up 557 yards and 62 points a week before the Colts arrived at LP Field.

And, Johnson was shown up Sunday by Colts quarterback Curtis Painter, who lumbered 79 yards on just seven runs for his life. Johnson managed 34 yards on 14 carries.

"It's something we have to get going if we want to continue to win and make the playoffs. Our goal is to win the Super Bowl,'' Johnson said.

To use one of former NFL coach Jim Mora's legendary rants: Playoffs? You're talking about playoffs? Playoffs?

Mora faced reality. I'm not sure Chris Johnson has.

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