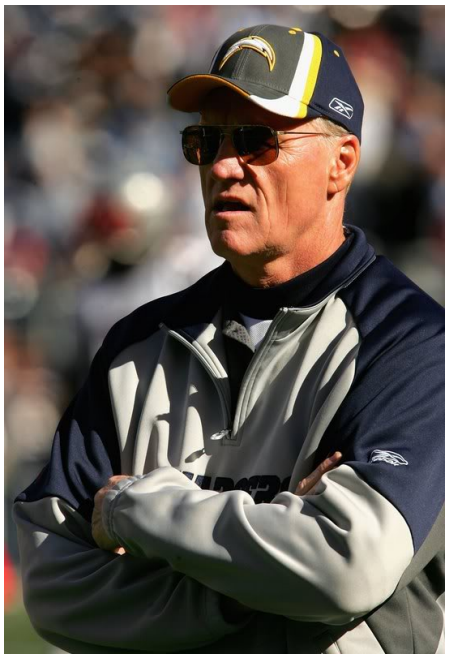
If you didn't feel bad for Marty Schottenheimer yesterday, you are inhuman. Once again, Marty lost a close playoff game with a legitimate Super Bowl contender of a team. Marty has now lost nine playoff games by a TD or less. In his return to the Blurbs, Jesse Lamovsky takes a closer look at those nine games, four of which happened with him as the Browns coach. Have these losses truly been Marty's fault? Jesse investigates.



The debate is on: Will the Chargers fire Marty Schottenheimer, on the heels of yet another postseason el-foldo? Does he deserve to be fired, following the agonizing loss to New England? Is he culpable for the failure of a 14-2 Chargers team that had the best overall talent and the best player in the universe … yet still couldn't even make it to the conference championship game?

Moreover, how much responsibility should Marty take for the repeated playoff disasters that trail around behind him like Jacob Marley's chains? Some would say that his 5-13 career playoff record isn't really a reflection on the coach; that Marty does a brilliant job turning also-rans into contenders and the postseason losses are just a result of, well, bad luck.

Here are the nine postseason games Marty has lost by a touchdown or less; a brief summary, and an answer to the question for each game- was the loss Marty's fault?

1985 AFC Divisional: Miami 24, Cleveland 21

Summary: The Browns took a 21-3 lead early in the third quarter but lost on a Dan Marino-engineered comeback.

Marty's fault? Yes. With a rookie quarterback (Bernie Kosar), Marty didn't want to open it up, and for most of the game didn't have to- his running game tore apart Miami's defense for 251 yards. But when the Dolphins sold out to stop the run in the second half, he made no adjustments- just continued to pound Earnest Byner and Kevin Mack into eight, nine, and ten-man fronts. And typical for Marty, he went to a soft zone with the lead, allowing Marino to get into a rhythm.

1986 AFC Championship: Denver 23, Cleveland 20 (OT)

Summary: The Drive. Cleveland had a 20-13 lead with 5:48 left, and Elway drove the Broncos 98 yards to tie in the last minute. Denver went on to win in overtime on a Rich Karlis field goal.

Marty's fault? Yes. He went to the prevent defense on the Drive, and as everyone knows, the prevent defense only prevents victory. Cleveland won the toss and got the ball first in overtime, but on 3rd and two, the Browns ran an off-tackle play to Herman Fontenot, who was more a receiving than a running halfback, instead of Kevin Mack (it was a shitty conservative call either way). Denver stuffed the play for no gain, got the ball back, and drove to the game-winning field goal. Marty's passive defense allowed John Elway to pick up a 3rd-and-18 on the game-tying Drive, and a 3rd-and-13 on the game-winning drive.

1987 AFC Championship: Denver 38, Cleveland 33

Summary: The Browns fell behind 21-3 at halftime and 28-10 in the third quarter; roared back to tie the game, but lost on a late Denver touchdown and Earnest Byner's subsequent fumble on the goal line- a play known only as the Fumble, of course.

Marty's fault? No. Cleveland moved the ball the entire game, but gave Denver its first 14 points off turnovers. Marty's conservatism never took root in this game- the Browns were down by too much too early and had to open up to come back. One could argue that defensively he should have done more to hold down Elway, but Cleveland's defense, like its offense, simply didn't execute. The tackling was atrocious in this game, and that can't be laid at Marty's feet. Besides, it was Elway at Mile High. You could only "hold him down" so much.

1988 AFC Wild Card: Houston 24, Cleveland 23

Summary: In the second game in two weeks played between the teams, Houston took an early 14-3 lead, fell behind 16-14, regained the lead 24-16, and hung on despite a late Cleveland touchdown. Were the game played today, the Browns would have had a chance to go for two and the tie following their last score, but unfortunately, the two-point conversion hadn't been introduced to the NFL in 1988.

Marty's fault? No. The Browns had come back to beat Houston the week before. It has to be tough to beat the same team twice in two weeks. Due to a rash of injuries that had to be seen to be believed, the Browns by the Wild Card Game were down to their fourth starting quarterback- ancient Don Strock. With all the quarterback problems, Marty did a pretty good job of getting his

team to the playoffs in the first place. Earnest Byner also took his team out of field-goal range with critical back-to-back unsportsmanlike conduct penalties to abort what looked like a sure scoring drive. At the time, Byner's sins were held against Marty, because Marty was the ultimate Earnest Byner booster. Both men were run out of Cleveland after this game. The Browns have never been the same since.

1990 AFC Wild Card: Miami 17, Kansas City 16

Summary: The Chiefs took a 16-3 lead into the fourth quarter, but Miami scored two touchdowns to take the lead. Nick Lowery missed a long field goal at the gun and the Dolphins hung on

Marty's fault? Yes. Now, his quarterback, Steve DeBerg, had an injured finger (injured may not be the word for it- to be more precise, DeBerg's digit was attached to the rest of his body by the skin only. He wore a gigantic bandage, but they showed the finger- it was somewhere between purple and black in color, and had a little metal pole sticking out of the top. It was quite gross). There was only so much Kansas City could do offensively with a lamed-up quarterback.

But... you can't blow double-digit leads in the fourth quarters of playoff games, first off. Secondly, Marty allowed Dan Marino- one of the more notoriously un-clutch great quarterbacks in NFL history, to come back from double-digit second half deficits not once but twice. Forget Elway- he was an equal opportunity killer (I'd say ask the Oilers, but they aren't around to answer). Going 0-3 in playoff games against Dan the Man is the real black mark on Marty's ledger.

1995 AFC Divisional: Indianapolis 10, Kansas City 7

Summary: The Chiefs were 13-3 and had home field throughout the AFC playoffs, but still lost to the 9-7 Colts thanks to key turnovers and three missed field goals by Lin Elliott.

Marty's fault? Well, yeah. You ought to be able to figure out a way to score more than seven points at home in a playoff game, even with Steve Bono as your quarterback. And Marty was still playing for a tying field goal late; long after it became apparent that the wind and the temperatures (15 degrees) were not conducive to the kicking game and that Lin Elliott (axed by Jimmy Johnson in Dallas in 1993) was completely unreliable in the first place.

1997 AFC Divisional: Denver 14, Kansas City 10

Summary: Denver came from behind on a Terrell Davis touchdown plunge and held off the Chiefs in the 4th quarter. John Elway went on to win his first Vince Lombardi Trophy. For the second time in three seasons, Kansas City had home field throughout and failed to advance to the AFC Championship Game.

Marty's fault? Yes. Once again his team was completely impotent offensively in a postseason game. The Chiefs had just 58 yards of total offense in the first half. Marty also punted from the Denver 31-yard line in the fourth quarter with his team down on the scoreboard. Not sure what

the distance was- it better had been fourth-and-goal to justify that kind of pussified play calling.

2004 AFC Wild Card: N.Y. Jets 20, San Diego 17 (OT)

Summary: The Chargers came back in the last minutes to tie the game, had an opportunity to win it with a field goal in overtime, missed the field goal, than watched the Jets go downfield and make their game-winning attempt.

Marty's fault? Oh, God yes. The Chargers were one of the league's most explosive teams during the regular season, but still had 7 points in the fourth quarter against New York. Antonio Gates was virtually ignored in the game plan until it was 17-7 Jets. And while Marty opened up to get the game tied, once in overtime, he tightened up again. His playcalling prior to Nate Kaeding's missed field goal in OT was an abomination; three straight line-plunges, then leave it up to a rookie kicker on a bad surface. Awful.

2006 AFC Divisional: New England 24, San Diego 21

Summary: The Chargers, 14-2 during the regular season and unbeaten at home, blew a 21-13 fourth-quarter lead and lost on a last-minute field goal.

Marty's Fault? Yes. Forget the fumble and the strip; the Chargers still led by eight with six minutes left. One stop- on the current drive or the one that followed- would have sealed the game for San Diego. The stop never happened, which isn't surprising; Marty's defenses *never* seem to get big stops when it matters. And typically, San Diego's D allowed the Patriots to convert a 3rd-and-long on the game-winning drive- shades of Elway to Mark Jackson on 3rd-and-18, twenty years earlier.

So of the eight playoff losses by a touchdown or less that Marty has suffered as a head coach, it seems reasonable, at least from my standpoint, to blame him for six of those, and take him off the hook for two. Take from that what you will. What can't be disputed is that, all talk of luck aside, there's a pattern here.