
A Passing Fantasy Issue 126

NFLBP Player Newsletter 2003 Preseason
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2002 SUPERBOWL REVIEW

Patriots 6 v 12 Rams

If high-octane offensive football is your thing, then the 2002 BP Super Bowl between the New England Patriots and St Louis Rams was *not* the place to be! It was an entertaining game, but one that was very much a battle between two teams whose defences perfected "bend but don't break" defence on the day. The first qtr started with both teams being forced to punt on their first possessions, the Patriots starting their second drive from their own three. They quickly moved to midfield but then Zolak's inability to throw the deep ball proved costly as the Rams D started to shut down the short passes to the TE, finally intercepting one and returning it to the Patriots 42. Five plays later the Patriots D stopped HB Trung Canidate a yard short of the first down, and the Rams took the lead with a 35-yard field goal. The Patriots progressed to the Rams 17 on their next drive, but on 3rd and 6 veteran NT Leonard Little sacked Zolak for a 7 yard loss, and then Vinatieri missed the 41 yard field goal attempt wide right. The 2nd qtr started with the Rams at the Patriots 44, but two plays later Canidate fumbled the ball away to New England. The Patriots offence couldn't move the ball though, and both teams traded possessions before the Rams took over again at their own 20. Four plays later Warner avoided an all out blitz from the Pats and dumped off a screen pass to Canidate for four yards, who promptly broke a tackle and raced a further 37 yards down to the Patriots 36. Next play Warner hit Holt for a 7 yard completion, but he was levelled by Patriots Strong Safety Larry

Whigham after gaining 12 yards, and coughed the ball up. New England took full advantage of the turnover, moving down to the Rams 12-yard line before stalling, and this time Vinatieri hit the 29-yard field goal dead central to tie the game. With 1 ½ minutes to go in the half Warner was looking to put the Rams in field goal range, but it was the Patriots D who made the big play, picking off a pass at the Rams 44 yard line. Zolak lead the Patriots O down to the Rams 8 yard line, but could only complete a two yard pass on 1st & goal and with no timeouts left the Patriots had to settle for the field goal with a second left on the clock, to go in at the half 6-3 up over the favoured Rams.

The second half started with the Rams at their own 20, and once again they had no trouble moving the ball in-between the redzones, but as soon as they hit the Patriots 24 yard line, the drive stalled, although the 43 yard field goal did enable the Rams to draw level with the Patriots at 6 each. Neither team threatened to score for the remainder of the 3rd qtr, but the final period started with the Rams driving deep into Patriots territory, the Warner to Holt combination getting the ball down to the Patriots 6-yard line. But once again the Patriots D stood tall and on three consecutive plays they pushed the Rams back, St Louis finally taking the lead with a 34-yard field goal. New England's offence was once again stopped around midfield on their next possession and after a 15 yard punt return the Rams started with the ball at their 30 yard line with 5 minutes to play in the game. Kurt Warner led the Rams on what he hoped would be the game winning scoring drive, and facing 3rd and 1 at the New England 16 just inside the two minute warning, he looked for TE Ernie Conwell in the endzone. However the killer TD didn't materialise as Warner was sacked for a loss of 6 yards, and the Rams settled for Jeff Wilkins converting his fourth field goal of the day, the 39 yarder putting the Rams up 12-6 and leaving the Patriots needing a TD to win the game. Rather strangely, the Patriots coaching staff benched

Zolak and brought on rookie sensation Drew Bledsoe for the final drive, but despite converting a 4th and 9 to keep New England hopes alive, a stupid penalty on 3rd and 1 at midfield effectively ended the Patriots Super Bowl dream, and a failed 4th and 11 later left Kurt Warner with nothing more to do than take a knee to confirm the St Louis Rams, and Coach Williams, first Super Bowl victory.

CHAMPIONSHIP BOWL REVIEW

The Bengals got the early lead but their offensive line struggled all day to contain the Eagles' front seven. The pressure began to tell in the second quarter, Philadelphia went ahead in the third and, although the Cincinnati offense made one final effort in the fourth, they couldn't overcome their own mistakes.

DIVISIONAL BOWL REVIEW

Tampa led at half time but couldn't add to the lead in the second half. The Dolphins took to the air in the fourth quarter and, while the Bucs were able to exert a lot of pressure, their QB found just enough time to get the passes off.

SILVER BOWL REVIEW

The Detroit big play passing offense was stymied by the Broncos' secondary, the Lions did get off one big play but also threw three interceptions. Denver took full advantage and sealed the win with a fourth quarter field goal.

BRONZE BOWL REVIEW

Two first quarter touchdowns for the Browns was all the help the defense needed as Cleveland dominated the Saints. New Orleans took until the first play of the fourth quarter to score, on a kick return, but were already well out of it by then

ST LOUIS POST-DESPATCH

St Louis Rams Super Bowl & Season Review with Coach Williams

First off, a big congratulations but also commiserations to Coach Pinder. To get his team to the Super Bowl, from the wildcard, with a 1* QB is a very impressive achievement, and that Super Bowl has to go

down as one of the toughest games I've ever played and won. I still can't quite believe how effective Dave's defensive gameplan was, when was the last time someone stopped my Rams from scoring a TD?! Believe me, with a 6* QB next season the Patriots are going to be the team to beat in the AFC. But back to this season, and I have to say, quite obviously, that I am extremely happy with the final outcome! Going into week one, I honestly believed that I'd missed my best chance to win the Super Bowl for a couple of seasons or so when I lost to the Raiders 14-11 last year - I expected the 49ers and Eagles to dominate the NFC while I waited for my rookie QB to sit on the bench for a year, and a wildcard win was the most I had in mind. But I seemed to hit upon a gameplan that made the most of my squad, and again my defence overachieved (the notable exception being a mullering at home to Darren's Bengals, which I will avenge this season...). It quickly became apparent that my team wasn't as weak as I thought, and with the 49ers struggling for consistency I reassessed my aims for the year and decided that a return to the Super Bowl was a legitimate objective. After the first half of the NFC Championship game against the Eagles though I really thought that Coach Gaines had sprung a surprise over me, and that it wasn't to be, but my team came good in the second half to get to the big game, and the rest, as they say, is history. All that is left for me to say is this, I'm not going to do a John Coleman and retire from BP after winning the Super Bowl, I fully intend to stick around to try and become the first team since the Packers to win back-to-back Championships. My record thus far at the Rams reads 8-6-2 (took the team over at 1-5-1, wildcard loss), 10-6 (wildcard loss), 13-3 (Super Bowl loss), 15-1 (Super Bowl win). So, next up 16-0 anyone...? ;o)

DRAFT REVIEW

Part Two

Carolina Panthers

Draft: RB 3 ORI, QB 3 OPS, DL 2 DBZ

Carolina had one of the worst offenses in the league last year, and they also had one of the worst defenses! Any draft would be a start, it looks like it'll take more than one to sort them

out, but they are in more need of blockers than backs. GRADE B

New Orleans Saints

Draft: TE 3 OPS, QB 3 OPL, WR 1*1 OPL

In yardage terms the Saints were fairly effective last year, they may be looking for a few more big plays in the close games from their third pick. Their run offense will benefit from the extra blocking at TE but an OL would have been a better pick. GRADE B

Seattle Seahawks

Draft: RB 3 ORI, LB 2 DRO, DB 2 DPL

Seattle had one of the top ranked offenses last season, but ranked near last in the running game – the first pick will redress the balance somewhat on offense, the rest of the draft was spent on improving and already solid D. GRADE A

Detroit Lions

Draft: OL 3 OQB, WR 2*1 OPL, LB 2 DRO

Extra blocker will help the rather poor running game, but expect the deep ball passing offense to continue next season. Defense needed help but pass defense was more of an issue for the Lions. GRADE B

Buffalo Bills

Draft: OL 3 OQB, RB 2 ORI, WR 2 OPL

Worst offense in the league last year needed a lot of help, this draft provides it. Buffalo may now be capable of scoring a few points to help out their defense. GRADE A

Arizona Cardinals

Draft: DL 3 DBZ, WR 2 OPL, RB 1 ORI

First pick was wasted, the Cards really didn't need another DL. The rest of the draft will help the offense improve but could have done better. GRADE C

Dallas Cowboys

Draft: DL 3 DBZ, DB 2 DPL, TE 1 ORO

Another team that didn't need DL and took one anyway, pass defense wasn't much of an issue either. Run blocking was a problem but

this looks like a bit of a token gesture. GRADE D

Kansas City Chiefs

Draft: DL 3 DBZ, OL 2 OQB, TE 1 OPS

FA: DB 4 1 DPS, DB 6 1 DPL

Veteran help for a very poor pass defense, strengthening both lines, this draft is a very definite step in the right direction for KC. GRADE A

San Francisco 49ers

Draft: DB 3 DPL, DL 2 DBZ, DL 2 DBZ

With all the offensive struggles San Francisco had last year it is somewhat surprising to see them draft exclusively for defense. A change in defensive strategy may account for the two DL but surely the offense needed more help? GRADE C

New England Patriots

Draft: RB 1*1 OPS, QB 3 OPS, DL 2 DBZ

FA: RB 6 2 ORI

Trade down in the first round, and a QB that may not make the roster in round two – the Patriots maneuver for losing points. After the success of last season's bold mid-season roster move it may be unwise to criticise but New England need help in the defensive secondary. GRADE B

Tampa Bay Buccaneers

Draft: LB 3 DRI, TE 2 OPS, PN 1*2 OPN

A move back to basics for Tampa? The Bucs attempt to shore up their run defense and give themselves more room to work with. The TE will fit right into the short passing attack. GRADE B+

Philadelphia Eagles

Draft: OL 2 OQB, WR 2 OPL, QB 2 OPS

We might be seeing a more expansive offense next season from the Eagles. The QB will likely not see the start of the season so we may see some free agent additions before too long. GRADE B

Miami Dolphins

Draft: WR 2*1 OPL, DB 2 DPL, PN 1*2 OPN

FA: OL 8 2 OQB, WR 3 1 OPL

Miami will be going with a new set of starters at WR this season. Veteran OL are always a help, DB doesn't address a need but could turn pass defense into a strength on a team with no major weaknesses. GRADE A

Cincinnati Bengals

Draft: OL 2 OQB, KK 1*2 OFG, WR 1*1 OPL

FA: DL 7 2 DRI

Filled holes on the lines, added depth at WR and picked up quite a few losing points. Solid draft will see the Bengals remain in contention for the superbowl. GRADE B+

St Louis Rams

Draft: QB 4 OPS, WR 1*1 OPS, WR 1*1 OPL

Great value for the first pick drafting 23rd, secondary help may have benefitted the team more than a third and fourth WR but I suspect there'll be LPs to spend before the season starts. GRADE B

Oakland Raiders

Draft: WR 2*1 OPL, KK 1*2 OFG, WR 1*1 OPL

FA: RB 7 1 OPS

Third round pick is already gone as Oakland look to do it with veterans. Didn't get exactly what they wanted out of the draft, really needed a DL and perhaps a DB, but did pick up enough losing points to do something about it. GRADE B-