
A Passing Fantasy Issue 132

NFLBP Player Newsletter 2004 Pre-season
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<http://uk.groups.yahoo.com/group/gameplan>

SUPERBOWL REVIEW RAMS CHAMPIONS AGAIN!

1ST QUARTER

It didn't take long for both teams offences to make up for the previous Super Bowl's lack of touchdowns. The Rams received the ball first, and took only three plays to show exactly why QB Marc Bulger leads the "Greatest Show on Turf". On third and short Bulger moved out strongside on the option pass, and hit Torry Holt in stride for a 54 yard completion. 5 plays later and TE Ernie Conwell scored the games opening TD on a 1 yard reception. The Patriots hit back immediately with QB Tom Brady leading New England 80 yards in 5 minutes, TE Christian Fauria scoring on a 9 yard pass to tie the scores. On the Rams next drive Bulger made the first mistake of the game, forcing a pass into tight coverage and seeing the ball picked off by SS Larry Whigam, who returned the ball 17 yards to the Rams 22. 4 plays later and FB Marc Edwards powered over from the 3 to put the Patriots up 14-7. Despite a 35 yard kick return to the Patriots 45 the Rams were unable to move the ball any nearer the endzone after a huge sack by veteran DLE Chad Eaton, and the quarter ended with the Patriots on the move at their own 69.

2ND QUARTER

Defences began to take control in the second quarter, and the game became a battle of field position. The Rams D finally made a breakthrough with the first play after the two

minute warning, NT Damione Lewis hurrying Brady into his second interception of the quarter, and giving the Rams the ball on the Patriots 13. Two plays later and Bulger hit Holt on a 7 yard pass to tie the game up at 14 apiece. A booming kick-off saw the Patriots start with the ball on their own 95, with 1 ½ minutes remaining in the half. Many coaches would play it safe and be happy for their team to go in on equal terms, but that isn't Coach Pinder's way. A quick and steady drive saw the Patriots move into field goal range and Vinatieri's 39 yard kick put the Patriots in 17-14 up at the half.

3RD QUARTER

The first 9 minutes of the quarter once again saw defences in control, the Patriots moving the ball better than the Rams but still failing to mount any significant threat. It was the Rams offence that broke the deadlock though, the Patriots risking an all out blitz against the Rams spread formation resulted in Holt turning a 5 yard completion into an 82 yard catch and run, CB Ty Law finally bringing Holt down on the 1 yard line. That only delayed the inevitable though, as FB Faulk crashed over for a 1 yard TD and a 21-17 Rams lead. Once again Brady brought the Patriots back immediately, another solid drive ending with Fauria scoring his second TD of the game, this time a 5 yarder, to send the Patriots into the fourth quarter 24-21 ahead.

4TH QUARTER

The Rams started the quarter by going three and out, and it was plain to see that Coach Williams was beginning to think that the Patriots were going to avenge last season's Championship defeat. And then came the game breaking play. The Rams 12 year veteran Punter Mitch Berger boomed a 62 yarder, and after signalling for the fair catch the return was fumbled and the Rams fell on the ball at the Patriots 15. One play later and Holt high stepped into the endzone, but a missed PAT left the Rams only a field goal ahead. No matter though, as the damage had been done,

the Patriots belief was shattered and two possessions later a sack by Grant Wistrom for a safety effectively hammered the final nail in the Patriots coffin. Holt completed the scoring with a 41 yard TD as the two minute warning sounded, and the Rams began to celebrate repeating as Super Bowl Champions.

Coach Pinder was noticeably depressed at the post game interview. He told us this:

"Congratulations to Martyn and the Rams, for the second season running they have proved to be the best in this league, certainly on the big day anyhow. We're very disappointed with the outcome, particularly our inability to react once we had fallen behind late in the game, but we'll learn from our mistakes and hopefully come back better next year. I think we'll also pay a little more interest to special teams this year, as in the end that as much as anything seems to have cost us eventually."

Coach Williams commented after the game, "Well as both myself and Coach Pinder had promised, we saw a much more thrilling and high scoring Super Bowl than last season's, but it was no less close. My heart goes out to Dave, there can't be many worse ways to lose a Super Bowl than thanks to a fumbled punt return, but the sign of a good team is to take the breaks you get and capitalise on them, and that is exactly what my Rams have done here today. Now we are up for the threeppeat, and you just know we are gonna give it our best shot! Go Rams!!!!"

MESSAGE SECTION

Dave Pinder to Everyone: "Good luck to all in BP for the new season, it looks to be as tough as ever and come on AFC, lets win back the Bowl!!!!"

2004 SEASON PREVIEW

Martyn Williams

AFC

The race for the playoffs in the AFC looks like being a real barnstormer this season. In the East the Patriots come back stronger and hungrier than ever to win the big one, but historically the Dolphins always rebound well from disappointing seasons and the Jets have

proved themselves a force to be reckoned with. In the Central Coach Birtchnell is certain that he has the squad in place to see the Bengals return to the Super Bowl for the first time in four years, but the Browns will be right behind them and the Ravens now have a squad and coach capable of challenging the AFC's elite. The West in comparison looks a little weak, but the Raiders will always be there or thereabouts, and the Chiefs should continue last season's good late form to provide Coach Crowther with a challenge for the first time in years.

Playoff Prediction: Patriots, Bengals, Raiders, Browns, Dolphins

NFC

Unlike the competitiveness of the AFC, the NFC once again looks like being a one horse race. The Rams are going for an NFLBP record fourth straight Super Bowl appearance and third straight victory, and not many on the NFC look capable of stopping them. The Eagles will once again be their main rivals with the Packers pushing from the Central. Coach Devine will be aiming to bring the 49ers back into the playoffs after an extremely disappointing 2003 campaign, but with the Rams offence returning in full and their defence gaining some much needed help at DB, the main focus of 2004 will be on which AFC team they will meet in that record Super Bowl appearance.

Playoff Prediction: Eagles, Packers, Rams, 49ers, Lions

Super Bowl Prediction: Bengals to beat Rams

2004 AVERAGE ROSTER SIZES

DIVISION	AVG. ROSTER
AFC East	57.75
NFC East	56.75
AFC Central	56
NFC Central	56
NFC West	56
AFC West	55.5

Doesn't mean much, especially with all the

off-season roster reshaping yet to finish, but interesting that the weakest division contains the reigning champions and the AFC East is the strongest overall despite having the league's smallest squad in Miami.

SPOTLIGHT ON OAKLAND

After a disappointing season by Raider standards are the one time champions ready to bounce back? The question was put to Oakland head coach Rob Crowther: "I don't think we're going to be any better personnel wise this season, our main weakness last year was our pass defense late in games – we lost a lot of games on last minute drives. With the retirement of Terry McDaniel we could be even weaker in that area than last season, Woodson is a promising player but I don't expect him to be up to McDaniel's standard right away." Can the fans hope for any improvement then? Coach Crowther was upbeat, "I don't believe we can have worse luck than last year, our offense returns even stronger and Darrell Russell has bulked up on the DL so hopefully we'll be better against the run and the DBs will therefore be freed up to concentrate more on the pass. But if we're going to be better than last year we may have to improve the roster further and, the key thing, improve our preparation and execution – a number of games last year we just weren't ready, that will have to change." Crowther finished by summarising the goals for the upcoming campaign: "We want to return to the playoffs, preferably by winning the division. Once there anything we achieve will be a bonus, but we may manage to get lucky."

SPOTLIGHT ON NEW ENGLAND

We asked Coach Dave Pinder about his hopes of returning to the big game: "We're once again very confident of our chances. We've only lost a couple of our veterans, our offensive line is intact from last year and we've added the fourth defensive back that we've been lacking for a while. In fact, expect the new guy to play quite a role, as with two blitzing safeties, a few quarterbacks are gonna find themselves under pressure. This is a reaction to our very poor stats on hurries, sacks and especially interceptions last year."