
A Passing Fantasy Issue 133

NFLBP Player Newsletter 2004 Championship Games

ed Robert Crowther

Welcome to the first issue of APF to hit the presses for a long time, inspired by the recent influx of coaches to the league, and a little bit of badgering from some long time coaches, I have resurrected the BP newsletter. Of course it helps a great deal that I didn't have to write much of it myself! Thanks to Darren, Martyn, Apple and Chris for their contributions this time, I hope to hear more from you all in the coming weeks. The address for contributions is:

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Or email at 'gameplan@crowther.info'. If you want to discuss Gameplan with other coaches have a look at the Yahoo! Group:

<http://uk.groups.yahoo.com/group/gameplan>

DIVISIONAL ROUND REVIEW

Baltimore had defeated Oakland in the regular season and started the game full of confidence, twice taking the lead in the first half. The Raiders edged ahead with a field goal in the third quarter before a quick fire drive of three long completions edged their lead out to ten points on the last play of the third. The Ravens responded with a field goal drive but the Raiders replied immediately with an 80 yard touchdown completion to seal the game.

New England's visit to Cleveland was marked by turnovers – 2 fumbles from the Pats and an interception from the Browns kept the scoring down in the first quarter, a breakout 58 yard touchdown pass giving Cleveland the lead. The New England offense settled down in the second quarter and put up two touchdowns in reply as Cleveland struggled to get going. The third quarter was more of the same, the Patriots extended their lead while the Browns went nowhere. On the first play of the fourth New England scored another TD to extend their lead to 17 points. Cleveland made a game of it late on following a fumble recovery in New

England territory but the Patriots were always in control and cruised to victory.

In Washington the 49ers made too many mistakes to take advantage of a superior offensive and defensive performance. The Redskins couldn't match San Francisco for yardage but won the turnover battle and got an excellent performance out of their special teams.

St Louis cruised to yet another championship game appearance, Detroit offered only token resistance and didn't even manage a touch-down until the fourth quarter, by which time the Rams were well out of sight. The Lions did manage a healthy running performance but inconsistent passing meant they failed to take advantage where it counts.

NFC CHAMPIONSHIP GAME PREVIEW

Martyn Williams

Washington Redskins (10-7)
@ St Louis Rams (15-2)

So once again the NFC East travels to St Louis to contest the NFC Championship game, although this time around it is the Washington Redskins rather than the Philadelphia Eagles who look to break the Rams recent domination of the NFC. That domination has seen St Louis lose only one game against NFC opposition in three seasons, and make the Super Bowl for tin each of those, matching the legendary Bengals and Packers teams of NFLBPs early history.

So the big questions are, can the Redskins pull off what would rank as one of NFLBPs major upsets, and can the St Louis Rams make history by appearing in 4 straight Super Bowls? Let's look at the history first. When these teams played in Washington back in week 9 the Rams ran away 44-19 winners, QB Marc Bulger tossing 5 TD passes and the Rams D picking off the Redskins Patrick Ramsey 3 times. However the Redskins did rush for 159 yards at 6.1 yards per attempt. And that highlights the big weakness in this Rams team, they are very susceptible to the run, especially

up the middle. If you look at the Rams two defeats this season, the Bengals pounded the ball up the gut and the Patriots averaged over 4 yards a carry. Having said that though, both losses were by the smallest of margins, and generally the Rams are up by so many points by halftime that they are willing to give up yards on the ground after the break rather than allowing the opposition to pass their way back into the game quickly. Pass defence is where the Rams D is strongest, both in terms of yardage allowed, interceptions and pass rush. So for the Redskins, everything would seem to point at a rush first gameplan to try and take advantage of the Rams weak rush D, but they may not have a big enough OL to consistently gain yards on the ground. Looking at the Rams O, this is very much a team designed around speed at WR and HB. Breakouts are where this team wins games, more often than not the opponent wins the time of possession and first down battle only to be on the end of a 20 or 30 point defeat. Bulger has had an amazing season, throwing 54 TD passes against only 9 interceptions, while also rushing for over 500 yards. As a generalisation, stop Bulger and you stop the Rams. But you can't focus entirely on the QB and wide receivers, the Rams have shown over the last three seasons that when required they can still win games by pounding out the yards with 13 year veteran FB Marshall Faulk and hitting 12 year TE Cameron Cleeland on short routes. This tactic often catches opponents by surprise who have gambled on pressurising Bulger and covering those 4 speedy wideouts.

To summarize, it would appear that this could be a season too soon for the Redskins to truly trouble the Rams. Their O doesn't appear to have the big play ability to match the Rams, or the pass D the playbook to consistently stop Bulger and co, although undoubtedly in SS Sam Shade and LCB Darrell Green they have the players to come up with the interceptions if the D is called correctly. So, with the worry of setting myself up for a huge fall, the smart money would appear to be on the Rams making history and getting to that 4th straight Super Bowl.

AFC CHAMPIONSHIP GAME PREVIEW

Darren Birtchnell

New England Patriots (14-3)
@ Oakland Raiders (15-2)

I'm probably as well qualified as anyone to give a non-biased preview of this game, having played both coaches on countless occasions in numerous leagues. They have also played each other plenty of times, so both will know the other's tendencies, but that could also lead to one of them being caught out should the other try something unexpected. Whatever happens, it should be a great game.

New England are defending their AFC title for the second year running and they will be hoping to go one better than the last two years, when they have lost to the Rams in the Bowl game. They made the Bowl game two years ago as a wildcard team, and again they will have to win on the road to get to the big game. They had a comfortable looking win in Cleveland last week, which was no mean feat given the Browns good run of form. They are certainly capable of beating Oakland in their own backyard, but Rob will be keen to get back to the Bowl game after a 2 year absence.

I think the Raiders are slight favourites for this, having homefield advantage and also having beaten the Pats in week 15. That game went to overtime, although its a bit hard to see why as Oakland had the edge in practically every area. The Raider offense had a good game back in week 15 and they followed that up with a 530 yard outing against Baltimore in the divisional round. But this is where it gets interesting.

Oakland have the leagues 2nd ranked offense, both in terms of yardage and points scored. They have been ranked 2nd nearly all season, so that shows they're consistent. However, the Patriots defense ended the season ranked 1st in both yardage and points allowed, so clearly something has got to give. They say that 'defense wins championships', so maybe New England hold a slight edge here?

On the other side of the ball the Pats seem to have a bigger edge, with the offense ranked 10th in yardage & 5th in scoring, while Oakland are only 20th in terms of yardage and 11th in points conceded. In other areas, the

teams are very evenly matched, in punting and both kick and punt returns. They even have a very similar number of turnovers on both sides of the ball!

So why am I picking Oakland you may ask? Well, tight games (like this one promises to be) often come down to 1 or 2 big plays. Oakland have been making plays on offense all season long and I just think it's their turn this year.

So after all of that analysis, it basically comes down to a hunch. So much for the scientific approach!

Prediction: Oakland 27 New England 21

PANTHER PONDERINGS

Chris Stones

Hello to all in NFLBP, I've just taken over as coach of the Panthers and am looking forward to challenging time in charge. I was re-introduced to gameplan about 10 months ago and coach a couple of other Basic teams in NFLB and NFLG, neither with a great deal of success yet, but give it time!

Good time to take over here in Carolina as there's still a fair bit of off-season sorting out to do, but with the last draft round, mini-camp and training camp to go before the new season, it should give me enough time to perform the necessary surgery on the roster. First impression is that I'm pretty pleased with it - obviously without being able to compare it with any other teams yet. Ideally I'd like to knock the offensive line into a bit better shape and hopefully I've enough LPs floating around to get a few improvements there. Have a couple of ideas about what to do with the last draft choice, but picking at 15 doesn't give me much of a guarantee that I'll pick up what I want, so I'll just have to wait and see.

Nothing competitive left to play for in the last 2 weeks, but it gives me a nice couple of games to work out what the team does well (and what it doesn't), and try a few ideas out. Going to need to be on the ball from day 1 of the new season as well, as those Rams in my division look to be pretty decent...

TAMPA BAY BORG

Apple

Having taken over Tampa Bay just before the draft, i tried to save some training and get the team into some sort of shape. A difficult task as i was left with a pile poop to be honest.

The draft is going well and the team will be almost ready for the start of the season, i would imagine that a season of training & player movements throughout will see us get to the playoffs but the season after is a more realistic target for us to go further.

Your probably wondering why the name "BORG" myself and Troy Dilworth will be co coaching the Buccs this season and we seemed to have picked the name up from our college exploits.

Both Troy and myself have played the basic game for many a year and won numerous superbowls in other leagues and we decided to try our arm at the college version, we had no idea as to what worked or not and we took on board some of the beatings in the early part of the season and "Assimilated" the plays & players to win the inaugural A9 bowl game.

We will be starting off with a 2 year 6* QB and decent O line so the running game will be upper most in my thought's as an O coach, decent Running backs will add to both the Run & Passing game.

Troy will be training his D and that will be in good shape for week 1.

All the best to all players this season, except of course Martyn Williams whose reign as the NFC & BP champion will hopefully come to an end. :)

GAMEPLAN GROUP UPDATE

Darren Birtchnell

There's been a lot of BP-related activity on the yahoo site recently (<http://uk.groups.yahoo.-com/>), here's a brief taster of what's been going on...

It all started with my good self seeing if others would be able to contribute to the newsletter, in an effort to get it up & running again. Apple gave a slightly cryptic response to this

which, after some input from Dave P, turned out to be that gameplan 'legend' Troy Dilworth will be co-coaching the Buccs, concentrating specifically on the defense.

At this point, myself and Chris Stones were a bit non-plussed, just having Apple join the league made it tougher, but Troy as well?! In between all of this, Martyn had got involved, mentioning his Rams are going for the 'threepeat' for the 274th time (change the record mate!), before Apple & then Troy started firing a few broadsides at him. To his credit, Martyn didn't rise to the bait and it all ended rather amicably, with Troy even offering what sounded like an apology!

And Martyn also said he'd rather face the Raiders, should he make it to the Bowl game. Make of that what you will...