
A Passing Fantasy Issue 134

NFLBP Player Newsletter 2004 Superbowl ed Robert Crowther

Thanks to Darren, Martyn 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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<http://uk.groups.yahoo.com/group/gameplan>

CHAMPIONSHIP GAME REVIEW

AFC

Oakland started with a big play, a 65 yard touchdown pass on the third play of the game put them in the lead. Both teams were able to drive to midfield after that but then were forced to punt. A promising New England drive ended with a fumble on the Raiders' 25 yard line as the first quarter came to an end.

The second quarter was all New England. A 60 yard punt left Oakland on their own two and a safety quickly followed. The Patriots then started on their best drive of the game so far, culminating in a 22 yard touchdown pass, though they failed the two point conversion. The Raiders didn't even manage a first down on their next two possessions but did manage to hold the Pats on a crucial 3rd and 1 to keep the game close.

The third quarter was more of the same from New England. After being forced to punt after driving into Oakland territory they again left their opponents in a difficult situation, starting from their own three. This time a pick off left the Patriots at first and goal on the two and they easily converted to extend their lead to eight points. Oakland got a pick off of their own a couple of drives later but were again unable to pick up a first down and had to settle for a field goal.

The Raiders opened the fourth quarter with a long drive, picking up their first 1st down since early in the second quarter, and got another field goal to cut the gap to two points. New England got the ball back but were once again held on 3rd and 1 and had to punt back to the Raiders. Starting on their own 11 with seven and a half minutes left it was do or die time for the Oakland offense, who had so far failed to make an impression on the Patriots' D apart from one big play in the first quarter. A tense drive, including a couple of 3rd and shorts converted, ended up with QB Don Hollas scrambling through an opening for a TD just after the two minute warning. New England got the ball back and needed a TD in less than 2 minutes to win. A decent return was followed by a number of short to medium plays leaving them at 1st and goal on the 1 with 2 seconds left. Their short yardage failures came back to haunt them on the final play as the pass was batted away in the endzone and the Raiders held on to earn their fourth NFLBP superbowl appearance.

NFC

The game started in a sloppy manner, three of the first four drives ended in turnovers before Washington finally got close enough to attempt a field goal, which they missed. St Louis were spurred into life by this and produced a nine play 72 yard drive which culminated in the game's first score, a 20 yard touchdown completion.

Both offenses continued to struggle in the second quarter but a couple of interceptions made all the difference for the Rams, getting the ball on the Redskins' one yard line following a 52 yard return and running another straight back for six to extend their lead to a commanding three touchdowns.

St Louis stamped their authority on the game in the third quarter, two big drives ran ten minutes off the clock and produced another ten points for the defending champions. Another field goal following a Redskins turnover

opened the fourth quarter and the Rams were cruising after that, Washington unable to crack the halfway line in their comeback attempts while St Louis ran out the clock.

ST LOUIS RAMS SET NFLBP RECORD WITH FOURTH STRAIGHT SUPER BOWL APPEARANCE!

Martyn Williams

Coach Williams took a little time out from preparing his team for the Super Bowl to answer some questions from the local media.

"So how does it feel coach, to make that fourth Super Bowl?"

Brilliant - it is nice to know that whatever else happens for me and the Rams in the future, we have achieved something that was beyond those classic Packers and Bengals squads of seasons past.

"I take it you were happy with how the Championship game panned out?"

Of course! I spent more time than normal on preparing the team and I think the 34-0 scoreline shows that. Other than two turnovers everything worked perfectly.

"You stated before the Championship games were played that should you win you would prefer to meet the Raiders in the Super Bowl. Would you care to expand on that comment?"

Sure, no problem. Quite simply, I couldn't bear to see Coach Pinder's face had I beaten him in the Super Bowl for the third straight time...! No, seriously, we've faced the Patriots four times the last two seasons and even though we are 3-1 in those games I just felt that Coach Pinder has a good feel for this current Rams team and gameplan. We haven't played the Raiders in a competitive game since that Super Bowl defeat three seasons back and this team and gameplan is very different to the one that lost that day. Also I would really like to get the threepeat by beating the Raiders and gaining revenge for that defeat that hurt so much three years back. That would be so sweet...

"Any thoughts on the game?"

I haven't looked at things in any great detail

yet, but I'd imagine this could be a shootout. Both teams score points for fun so I doubt either defence will dominate, but it could be a key turnover or two that makes all the difference...

"Good luck Coach on going for that threepeat - the whole of St Louis is behind you!"

Cheers - would love to win so I can always go on about the threepeat to Coach Birtchnell!

ROAD TO THE SUPER BOWL

Darren Birtchnell

Here's how Oakland made it to the big game:

Dolphins 35 Raiders 43
 Seahawks 24 Raiders 30
 Raiders 55 Titans 21
 Raiders 21 Bengals 17
 Raiders 24 Chiefs 21
 Raiders 41 Eagles 37
 Browns 35 Raiders 29
 Broncos 10 Raiders 43
 Raiders 30 Bills 17
 Raiders 31 Broncos 28
 Ravens 24 Raiders 20
 Packers 7 Raiders 27
 Jets 22 Raiders 38
 Raiders 38 Seahawks 20
 Raiders 30 Patriots 24 (OT)
 Chiefs 9 Raiders 21
 Divisional Round - Ravens 17 Raiders 31
 AFC Championship - Patriots 15 Raiders 20

After going through the results you can see that, other than the week 3 thumping of the hapless Titans, the Raiders had some very close games to start the season. They managed to withstand a 550 yard and 32 first down performance from the Dolphins on opening day, and they also gave up more points and yardage than they would have like in a number of other games, but they still found a way to win most of these games. Of the two games they did lose, the game with Cleveland was a very tight affair while the loss to Baltimore was a bit of a strange game. They comfortably outgained the Ravens in yardage and first downs, but the Ravens made a couple of big plays and just held on for the win.

The loss to Cleveland seemed to spur the Raiders defense into action and, for the most

part, they played much better over the latter stages of the season. Since the Baltimore game in week 11 they have only had two what you could call close games, both against the Patriots, so that says to me they are in good form. Any team that can beat the Pats twice in one season must be pretty handy!

Here's how St Louis made it there:

Giants 10 Rams 24
 49ers 27 Rams 44
 Rams 31 Bears 24
 Rams 27 Packers 7
 Rams 24 Panthers 0
 Bengals 17 Rams 16
 Buccs 32 Rams 35
 Saints 21 Rams 49
 Rams 44 Redskins 19
 Rams 27 Saints 24
 Lions 7 Rams 43
 Rams 20 Patriots 26
 Cowboys 10 Rams 35
 Rams 38 49ers 21
 Rams 41 Eagles 17
 Panthers 10 Rams 54
 Divisional Round - Lions 10 Rams 38
 NFC Championship - Redskins 0 Rams 34

After going through the games and stats, one thing becomes very clear about St Louis: to stand a chance of beating them you need to shut down QB Marc Bulger. In their two losses this season, the Rams struggled to pass the ball on both the Bengals and Patriots and lost as a consequence. Martyn will tell you that he occasionally likes to run the ball more, but with the game on the line I'm certain he would put the ball in Bulger's hands.

Something that might concern Oakland though, is that since the defeat to New England, the Rams passing game has been in outstanding form. But while the Raiders may not have been that great on defense this season in terms of yardage, Rob knows the game inside out and I'm sure he'll have something up his sleeve to contain the Rams passing attack.

So looking at the game from a neutral's point of view now, the key for Oakland will be to either get ahead of the Rams early on, or if they fall behind, to keep it tight. It may well prove that the best way to contain the Rams passing game is to keep it off the field - that's

what the Bengals did in week 6 and Oakland will be fully aware of that. The Rams will also be aware of this however, which presents Martyn with an interesting dilemma - does he anticipate the Raiders running the ball straight down his throat, and therefore call a bit more run defense than normal? And what about the other side of the ball - does he try to call Rob's bluff by running it more himself? Only the coaches themselves will know.

It looks like being a very interesting game, with two excellent coaches who have played each other more times than they care to remember I'm sure. Ever since my Bengals were knocked out of the playoffs I've been saying the Raiders will go all the way, so I see no reason to change my mind now.

Good luck to both, but GO AFC!!

Prediction: Raiders 24 Rams 20

PANTHER PONDERINGS

Chris Stones

Very pleased to achieve a win in my first game, even if it didn't really mean a great deal because it's only pre-season. The Giants leapt to an early lead and moved the ball well in the 1st quarter, but my defence then decided to get into the game. They forced three turnovers before the half ended and our scoring as a result of these meant we were cruising for the second half.

My main aim for these games is to try and work out the best way to approach our offence. Looking at the stats for the year, this seems to have been a big problem for the team. We were ranked last in overall offence and 3rd worst in rushing. The passing game was the focus and even that wasn't too hot, ranked at 18 and seeming to rely on the big play and dumpoffs. There is nothing wrong with a pass first offence, but you also need to be able to rush the ball reasonably well to keep teams honest. We had a nice balanced look on our offence against the Giants and the rushing game performed noticeably better than the regular season record, so I'm hopeful we will be vacating last place in the offence stakes sometime soon!

On D I'm looking at the performance of a few specific plays that I've not used much before

which are trained up here, and try and get an idea as to where to use them effectively.

Pleased to get the free agent wideout who will replace a retiree and reasonably happy with the draft pick. If I can snaffle another FA this turn, it will have been a nice couple of weeks on the roster front.

Best of luck to everyone in the bowl games and especially to Martyn and the Editor in the Superbowl.