
A Passing Fantasy Issue 155

NFLBP Player Newsletter 2005 Superbowl ed Robert Crowther

Thanks to Darren, Apple, Martyn and Dave for their contributions this time – making it a bumper issue for the superbowl! The address for contributions is:

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Or email at 'gameplan@crowther.info'. Looking for some season previews, or just opinions on how you think your roster building has gone this offseason, for the next two issues. If you want to discuss Gameplan with other coaches have a look at the Yahoo! Group:

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

CHAMPIONSHIP GAMES REVIEW **Darren Birtchnell**

The Chiefs adventure finally came to an end in New England, as the Pats held on for a tight victory on the back of two early TD's. The KC offense gained a decent amount of yardage but didn't convert enough 3rd downs and they didn't get into the endzone until the 4th quarter, by which time it was too late. New England will now play in their third SB in four seasons, all against the Rams. Dave will be hoping to sign off with a SB win which is long overdue.

St Louis effectively won their battle with Tampa in the 2nd quarter, scoring 20 unanswered points to build a big half time lead. The Buccs had been in front early on, but the Rams used a slightly different approach to this one and it paid off. Tampa took a couple of chances on 4th down which didn't pay off and the Rams were able to hold them at arms length for the rest of the game. The only question now is can they make it four in a row?

AFC CHAMPIONSHIP GAME REVIEW **Dave Pinder**

Tension and nerves filled the air as the two fi-

nalists for the AFC championship met at Foxboro. The Chiefs, in their first BP Championship Game on the back of aggressive defence and an effective deep-ball game were seeking their second win over the Patriots of the season. Week 11 had seen a breathtaking finish as the Patriots were stopped at the one on a 4th and goal with little time remaining as the Chiefs won 24-20 at Arrowhead.

With homefield advantage, the Patriots felt much more confident and were visibly better motivated than they had been in week 13. The first play from scrimmage boosted their morale as they forced Cloud to fumble after a short gain, luckily for the Chiefs he fell on the loose ball and the danger passed. The Chiefs took advantage of the luck as they marched to the New England 11, where they settled for a 31 yard FG following a big third down loss.

Brady and the Patriots took the field but immediately found themselves having to convert third and long. Brady hit branch for two long completions to ease the pressure and 9 year veteran FB Larry Centers barged in from four yards to give New England the lead.

They added to the lead a lot sooner than KC would have liked. The Chiefs started the drive with an air of authority, with decent gains on the ground and in the air, but the Pats defence forced a third and long. The blitz took Grbac by surprise and he was hit hard by LB Tedy Bruschi. The hit jarred the ball loose, being gratefully scooped up by DB Eugene Wilson who scampered 43 yards to score.

Following this rash of activity the game somewhat died down. Both sides struggled to move the ball against strong defence and the only other notable play of the half was a fumble given up by Branch after a big hit by Eric Warfield. KC were unable to capitalise on the turnover and the half ended 14-3 New England.

The third quarter was similarly tense, another NE fumble being the highlight as Brady coughed it up on a sack. Once again the NE

defence held. The last drive of the quarter saw KC start to gain momentum. The Chiefs shifted into hurry-up mode and the change of pace temporarily caught out the New England defence.

A big checkoff from Grbac to Duckett gained a game-high 47 yards, landing at the NE 2. A pass attempt on 1st down fell incomplete, another on second down resulted in a sack and then third down draw by Grbac was halted at the 1. As the NE crowd celebrated, the Chiefs took the bold move of going for it on 4th and 1, with the game on the line. The stadium suddenly fell very silent as Grbac found Alexander open for the score. Unfortunately for KC fans, the 2-pointer fell incomplete, so the Patriots still led by 5, early in the fourth.

The rest of the fourth quarter saw defences once again dominate, with the pressure telling on both teams with key penalties, sacks and missed opportunities. The sigh of relief was almost audible as a final hail mary from the 26 was batted away in the New England endzone and intercepted at the 1 yard line by star safety Rodney Harrison.

The Patriots did their best to throw it away however, with two pass attempts safely negotiated Brady took a knee and the Patriots won their place in their Third BP Superbowl Final.

NFC CHAMPIONSHIP GAME REVIEW

Martyn Williams

This was the game everyone wanted to see in NFLBP, including both sets of coaches. APPLE and Troy took charge of the Buccs specifically to give Coach Williams some stiff competition in his pursuit of a fifth straight NFC title. When these teams had met earlier in the season the game had ended in a 17-17 tie, so it was a defensive battle that was expected but by halftime that expectation had been blown away by the Rams special teams and defence. Two big kick returns, two turnovers and a failed 4th down attempt gifted the Rams a short field after short field and they took full advantage, going in at the half 27-10 up. Another failed fourth down in the 3rd Qtr at the Rams 17 effectively ended the game for Tampa and any remaining thoughts of a Buccs comeback ended with 7 minutes left on the clock when the Rams returned a punt 45 yards to the Buccs 12 yard line and scored a TD two

plays later to put them up 34-10. That score finally saw the Buccs react and come out passing, a tactic that did result in a consolation TD, but that was as good as it got for Buccs fans as the Rams celebrated continuing their record breaking run by making the Super Bowl for the 5th season on the trot! Coach Williams had this to say after the game "I'm ecstatic, that goes down as one of my best ever victories. I wasn't very confident going into this game to be honest, I knew we'd score points because I always do against Troy somehow, but I've always had big trouble beating APPLE, having done so only twice in over 10 attempts. Because of that I gambled quite heavily with my D playcalling on 1st and 2nd down and in short situations, and changed my philosophy significantly as well, going with what has worked brilliantly for me in my recent NCAA football successes. Basically, I knew I had to do something different on D to stop APPLE, something unexpected, and it worked far better than I thought it would and won us the game. It's a shame that APPLE and Troy have now decided to leave Tampa but they can be proud of getting the Buccs to the Championship game in only one season - that shows just how good they are!"

DIVISIONAL BOWL REVIEW

Darren Birtchnell

The Raiders won comfortably in Cincinnati in a game that neither team was too worried about. The Bengals made numerous changes to their gameplan and held an early lead, before the Raiders sussed it out and went on to win at a canter. Green Bay put in a good performance to see off the Eagles. The Packers were aggressive on defense and kept the ball with a power running game to set up an intriguing clash with Oakland this week.

SILVER BOWL REVIEW

Darren Birtchnell

The Panthers avenged their late-season loss to New Orleans with a nine point win at home. Carolina got ahead early and were able to keep the Saints from coming back into it, holding them out of the endzone until a late TD pass made the scoreline respectable. Cleveland made short work of the Niners as they won with ease. San Francisco gained more yardage and appear to have held the ball for longer, but the Browns forced four turnovers

and took advantage of their opportunities.

BRONZE BOWL REVIEW

Darren Birtchnell

Buffalo won their second consecutive game for the first time in ages to reach the Bronze Bowl final. They held onto the ball with a pounding running game and got some big plays through the air to seal the win. Their opponents will be Detroit, who surprisingly won in Miami. The Lions used a similar formula to Buffalo and held the Dolphins scoreless for the final three quarters.

TAMPA BAY BULLSHIT

Apple

First off I'd like to congratulate Martyn on reaching another Super Bowl, well done mate. We tried hard to get the Buccs in shape all season after we had stated that we would be here for 1 season only, it was a tall order but I think we achieved it.

As far as our squad and training goes it almost went to plan and I must admit we fancied our chances of turning Martyn over in this game, but he's not the multiple champion for nothing. He has the squad set up to perfection the way he likes it, but take nothing away from him, he can play football too.

When the game got under way I got the feeling early on that it was going to be hard, it always is with Martyn's teams but this was different. When you get great match-ups you have to make them tell, there must have been at least 5 times PW, RN and LO vs Martyn's IX that were stuffed or stopped and as an O coordinator that just frustrates you, as you know the D is coming and put the O plays in place to capitalise but they don't work. Not quite sure how he got his D to do this as I was in the J formation and have a 15 point O-line!

You make your own luck sometimes in this game and going for 4th downs with 1 yard to go and getting stuffed with these match-ups just tells you it's not your day.

Overall Martyn deserved to win and from the O of Tampa, I for one wish him the best of luck and will be rooting for him to win the big one yet again. GO RAMS!!!!

DRAFT REVIEW

Darren Birtchnell

The final round is often a case of taking the best player available and it was the same here. The Titans took a WR when they might have been better served taking an O-lineman, it's hard for QB's to look for receivers when they're buried under a pile of defenders. Buffalo added to their already strong D-line while Dallas went for an OL. The next 3 picks all went on LB's, before both New York teams added a DB. The Lions then continued to copy the Niners draft strategy as they also snapped up a LB. The next 3 picks were all DB's before Miami took the last 2* O-lineman. The Saints opted for a WR before the Eagles took the most talented player remaining, a 3* QB, although it's highly likely he won't ever get to play for the Eagles. The Packers got great value for their pick, finally snapping up the 2* RB with a return strength. Goz has got a steal there IMO. After the Chiefs took a WR to go with their free agent acquisition, the Ravens were forced to take a 1* DB to fill a hole. The Panthers followed Philly's lead and went for talent over roster needs before Oakland took a punter to go with their kicker from the last round. Tampa got good value for picking so late while New England took another player who could turn into LP fodder. The Bengals were forced to take a 1* WR and St Louis brought proceedings to a close by taking a punter.

It will be interesting to see the rosters when they are published, as the new rules concerning free agents will certainly have had an effect.

SUPERBOWL X PREVIEW

Martyn Williams

So Coach Pinder gets one last attempt to win the NFLBP Super Bowl, and once again he faces Coach Williams' Rams, architects of both his previous Super Bowl defeats. So will it be third time lucky for the Patriots, before Coach Pinder goes into pro football retirement?

If we start by looking at both teams rosters then the Patriots have a huge advantage in squad size and overall experience, although perhaps key is the Rams bigger and more experienced O line. The Patriots have the more talented QB and more experienced backfield

and receiving corps, although during the season they have almost been held back, Coach Pinder's offensive gameplanning never really letting them loose to wreak havoc on opposing D's. That is of course something that Coach Williams lives and dies by, attack, attack, attack with his offensive weapons, daring his opponents to become more aggressive on D to get the big play, but also increasing the chances of another Bulger to Holt bomb. Having said that though, the Rams O has been a bit more conservative where necessary this season, even switching to a power running game when these two teams met in week 12. At the time that was a must win game for the Rams, and in New England they came away with a very convincing 26-10 victory, a victory which kick started their current 7 game win streak. New England will no doubt have learnt from that defeat, and on paper they do appear to have a defence that matches up better with the Rams O than the Rams D does with the Patriots O. This game promises to be close, but is unlikely to be a dour defensive battle like the Rams defeat of the Patriots in Super Bowl VII, both teams should be able to put 20+ points on the board. So who will win? Coach Williams is 2-0 in Super Bowls against Coach Pinder, and 0-1 in NCAA Gold Bowls, suggesting the Rams coach has the upper hand in the Pro game and will therefore be the bookies favourite. But this is Coach Pinder's last shot at Super Bowl glory and I can't see him ending up on the losing side a third time. And I must admit a small part of me probably hopes he doesn't (only a very small part though Dave...) ;o)

SUPERBOWL PREDICTIONS

Darren Birtchnell: Rams by 3

Rob Crowther: Rams by 10