



## PEYTON JOINS NAPOLEON AT HIS OWN WATERLOO

By Kerry Schmidt 01-23-2005

Napoleon met his final defeat at Waterloo. Thus the saying, "...met their Waterloo." But Napoleon only had to endure that once. And thus the saying, "once is enough." And I guess the plural of Waterloo would, of course, be Waterloos.

Which brings us to its first cousin, nemesis, the plural of which is nemeses, according to Webster. Sounds strange.

Anyway, New Orleans native Peyton Manning is now, if not a master thereof, certainly familiar with the nemesis tag, and the plurality of same definitely sounds bad to him.

He is not alone. Throughout sports history, there have been nemesis and nemeses.

Phil Mickelson could not win a big one, until last year.

Boston took 86 years to exorcise their World Series demon.

The Buffalo Bills lost four straight Super Bowls and still have not been victorious.

John Elway lost three until he finally broke through with two consecutive wins in '98 and '99.

No team could beat Brett Favre and the Packers at Lambeau Field when the temperature was below freezing for 32 straight games, until the Flacons did it in the playoffs two years ago.

And on and on.

Enter Manning.

He became famous in his hometown, and continued to do so in Mississippi and Indiana. However, I have to believe he has little love lost for Massachusetts, where he is 0 for 7, including two in the playoffs.

Now I know Manning loves this country, but the word "Patriots" to him has to ring a sour note.

Manning set several records this year, the biggest being 49 TD passes, edging out Dan Marino's 48 in 1994, and he won his second consecutive MVP award.

Two weeks ago in Denver, he continued his blitzkrieg as his team amassed nearly 500 yards, 49 points and he threw four TD's.

With New England's top two cornerbacks and defensive end out, all the so called experts said this was the year he would break the jinx, and lead his team to the promise land. I myself, though no expert, loudly predicted a Colts win.

But all the above "experts" forgot about one guy, who doesn't even play! Bill Belichick. He is far and away the best coach in the NFL and he is to defense what Bill Walsh was to offense. Some guy named Nick Saban, among others, learned defense under Belichick. The Colts scored 66 TD's in the regular season and amassed 522 points and 6,475 yards. Against the Pat's defense, they managed one lone field goal! The Colts' longest play from scrimmage was 18 yards.

Yes, the Pat's D is very good, but not the best. It is Belichick that puts together such a brilliant game plan against each specific opponent.



Plus, they used their “average” offense as they often do, as part of the defense. They had three scoring drives that covered 68, 87 and 94 yards and took a combined 45 plays and 28 minutes off the clock. As Belichick said, “The best defense against (the Colts) is to keep Peyton off the field.”

The Pats had the ball nearly 38 minutes to the Colts’ 27.

And the Colts, who led the league in turnover differential, committed three (the Pats zero), thus giving Peyton and company 13 TO’s in the last four games versus New England.

Nemesis, jinx, voodoo curse, or whatever, Belichick and his bunch own Peyton and the Colts.

As great a QB as Manning is – he will go down as one of the all-time greatest when his playing days are over, he still has that horrendous tag on him: “He can’t win the big one.” Maybe that’s not fair, since football is a team game, but the QB is the leader, and, rightfully or not, that will be his monkey until he breaks through.

Hall-of-Famer Elway had it until he broke through. Soon to be (this year) Hall –of –Famer Steve Young had to endure that monkey monitor until 1995.

A few weeks ago as I sat in the press box of the Saints – Carolina game, I asked a couple of writers around me if they could name a player on the Pats other than Tom Brady. Of the three, only one could name another, Corey Dillon, whom they acquired this past off season from Cincinnati. The “No Names.”

Going into this weekend of the two conference championships, New England is only the fifth visiting team since 1990 to be favored. Three of the last four visiting favorites won and covered the spread.

And, the only readily recognized name on the Pats, QB Brady, has never lost a playoff game. He is 7-0, tying him with Troy Aikman for consecutive playoff wins to start a career.

Perhaps still awash in the whipping they laid on the league’s offensive juggernaut, I say Brady will avenge an earlier loss to Pittsburgh and go to the Super Bowl for the second year in a row, and third in the last four.

And, unless Philadelphia wins and has Terrell Owens back at full strength, I see them repeating.

Again, not necessarily because they are the best team, but because they are the best coached. They do not make mistakes, they keep it smash – mouth simple and they execute (literally and figuratively) to perfection.

As an afterthought, the Vikings and Rams looked like the 8-8 teams they were as they sneaked into the playoffs, and got thoroughly trounced last week end.

Should the 16-1 Steelers upset the Pats, and the Eagles stop Michael Vick and company, you will have a first: An all Pennsylvania SB. Fitting perhaps, since so many great players have come from Pennsylvania and the fans in those two cities are as rabid as any in the league.

Anyway, Sunday will be cold and windy most everywhere, and I for one will be ensconced in front of my wide screen plasma and with a fire going. It doesn’t get any better than this.