



SB XLIII: AKA “BAILOUT BOWL,” THEN, THE DARK AGES BEGIN

By Kerry Schmidt February 1, 2009

Well, another SB is upon us.

And while this is the ultimate sporting event in America, there is a very dark side right after the “I’m going to Disney World” part.

We enter the DARK AGES!

No real sports for a long time. Yea, I know pitchers and catchers report to spring training in a couple of weeks, and MLB will start in April, but, other than the Red Sox and Yankees hating each other again, it sucks.

Baseball season lasts 7 months. Give me a break. My advice: Take a bunch of steroids and pay attention around September.

Also, you have the NBA. Glandular cases running around in their underwear.

Hell, only the last 2 minutes of each game is worth watching, even in the playoffs. And half the teams are in them, so wait til the finals. In the interim, drink heavily.

Yep, DARK TIMES for sports fans.

When Tiger comes back, a few will watch golf, but, well, glad I have many DVD’s.

Oh yea, the SB.

Zillions of dollars are involved in this event, although, I should say, zillions minus a few million. The economy sucks, and it will not be fixed by Obama until a few weeks after the SB, so everything is being pared way back.

Except for the cost of commercials. You shell out \$2.9 mil for a 30 second spot. Note: These were sold many moons ago, so the NFL has the bucks.

But the crowds that usually accumulate in the week before the SB, well, “They’re not here,” said Marty Greenwald, a hot dog vender who has sold his weenies for the last 21 SB’s.

“No crowds,” he says. “All I see are empty streets. This is by far the worst SB I have ever seen.”

Thus, the “Bailout Bowl” looks a bit bleak as far as pre-game festivities.

Last Monday, the beginning of the super-hype, companies laid off over 50,000 workers.

Playboy, which has had a giant bash for the last 20 years, spending over 15 million, is a no-show this year. Likewise Victoria’s Secret. Thus, dirty old men, like me, will not get to see sexy ladies dressed up in not much.

GM, bailout and all, have given a small few top dealers just tickets and hotel. No party.

Seven other companies, et al, have cancelled their events entirely and many more have “scaled them way back,” said a league spokesman.

Tickets. Face value is \$1,000, and scalpers usually get \$2,500 or more. Right now, they can’t even get the one grand, and many say you could walk up at game time and get a ticket half price. Even the press is scaling back. The league says they have received over 400 fewer credential requests.

Enough. Hell, Obama may have all this economy thing fixed by half-time.

The game.

As I said last week, David vs. Goliath.

I honestly believe the Cards have a decent shot at upsetting the Steelers. Probably not, but all that matters anyway is the spread. I’ve got a few bucks down on AZ plus 7.

Note: Ironic, but way back in 1944, with what became the NFL just getting started, the Cardinals and Steelers actually merged their two teams. True. Officially, they were the Card-Pitt, but the press labeled them the Carpets.

Probably because they never won a game.



OFF THE WALL SPORTS

Pittsburgh is spelled Defense. AZ, offense.

For Pitt, their LB's are the key to the game. For AZ, their WR's are their ticket. And, reborn Kurt Warner to get the ball to them.

Larry Fitzgerald is THE WR in this game. He has been nearly unstoppable. He set an NFL record of 419 receiving yards in the playoffs, breaking the record held by another decent receiver, Jerry Rice.

At 6' 3" and 220 pounds, add in a 43 inch vertical jump and he is "insane," says Steeler All-Pro safety Troy Polamalu.

Fitzgerald spends hundreds of hours practicing catches – with one hand.

Pitt CB, Ike Taylor, who will be one on one with Fitz, says "I've seen him drop one pass – in 19 games."

Fitzgerald's dad will be at the game. But he can't cheer for his son. Fitz SR is a sportswriter, and will be in the press box, where no cheering is allowed.

Steelers' safety, Tyrone Carter, also has a no-show special cheering for him. His brother, Tony. Tony committed a few, relatively minor infractions, but failed to show up for court hearings so he could watch his brother in his first SB.

Shaking his head, Tryone said, "I tried, but he said he just had to watch me in the SB. If he had only gone, he would be here today. But I will be thinking of him every minute."

Given the attention Fitz will get, the "other" WR, Anquan Boldin, could be a major force for AZ. I have spoken many times about how today's players are "soft," not the "Dick Butkis, Ronnie Lott tough of old."

Boldin, a 3-time pro-bowler himself, certainly earned a spot in that old group

On September 28, going "over the middle," he leaped and was nailed between two defenders of the Jets. It was face mask to face mask smash mouth hit. Literally.

He was down and out.

His jaw was broken in 7 places, along with his nose and left eye socket. He required 3 operations, and added 7 titanium plates and 4 rods, held together with 41 screws just to anchor his "nearly totally destroyed" face.

Tough? With all the added hardware, Boldin missed just 2 games!

His first game back, he caught 9 passes for 2 TD's in a loss to Carolina just 3 weeks after "The Hit," as all the players call it.

"I have never seen anyone as tough and as wanting to play, regardless," said offensive coordinator Todd Haley.

So, with Fitz getting most of the attention, maybe Pitt will use a metal detector to track down Boldin.

Warner's quick release, and accuracy, could combine with the 2 WR's to give Pitt a problem.

For Pitt, their LB's are a mainstay. They have played a 3-4 defense for over 30 years, and legendary names at LB abound. Led by defensive player of the year, James Harrison, they have a combined 22 sacks. Then add in perhaps the hardest hitting player in the NFL, Polamalu, and you see why they led the league in defense, and gave up only 13.9 points a game.

And besides Polamalu, add in LB Harrison and safety Ryan Clark – he is the one that knocked out Raven's RB Willis McGahee in the AFC title game, forcing McGahee to be carried off on a stretcher, and you have one hell of a smash-mouth threesome.

Some of Pitt's legendary LB's.

Probably none more so than "the monster," Jack Lambert. 68% voted him the best LB in Steelers history. Jack Ham came in a distant 2nd, with 14%.



OFF THE WALL SPORTS

Toss in names like Kevin Green, Greg Lloyd and Joey Porter, and you have some of the best LB's ever. (Yes, I know, my main man, Butkis is the best, and LT and Mike Singletary also, but they played on different teams.)

Quick story: In John Elway's very first game, he faced Lambert. As he told the story, "I come up to the line, and there is this "creature." He had blood dripping out of his EYE socket. No front teeth, slobber coming out of his mouth. Elway called TO. He walked over to this coach on the sidelines, and said, "Hey, I just graduated from Stanford. I don't need this. I'll become an accountant."

But Pitt has their own pretty good set of receivers. Hines Ward (he says his injured knee is "fine,") and Santonio Holmes are two of the best in the league. And, AZ's Dominique Rodgers-Cromartie, a rookie, will have to cover one or both of them.

QB's: Pitt's Ben Roethlisberger is out to play better than he did in SB LX. Hell, he couldn't possibly do any worse. Can he?

He won, but Big Ben completed just 9 of 21 passes for 119 yards and 2 INT's. His QB rating was 22.6! Still, they won the game. See DEFENSE.

Roethlisberger is an above accurate passer, and can throw the long ball. But his offensive line is virtually new, and he has been sacked 46 times, No. 4 in the league. He is big, but not mobile. He is also a bit reckless with the ball, losing 7 fumbles and had 15 INT's. Only 19 TD's. Plus, he tends to hold the ball a little too long. That could cost him.

AZ's D-line is 7th in the league in sacks. They have 7 in their 3 playoff games.

Cards' D was poor in regular season. But in playoffs, they shined.

We've all heard of how a team "gets hot (on a roll, etc) at the right time.

Remember last year? Giants were 5-6, going nowhere. Then they were on fire and upset the unbeaten Patriots in one of the biggest upsets ever.

The 2001 Pats. Barely made the playoffs, but won their first SB as a wildcard.

Now, is it AZ's turn? They were 6-6, but won last 3 of 4 to win their division.

Then, they went from hot to blazing. Momentum, whatever, but AZ has it right now

Their supposedly leaky D? They shut down Atlanta's running game – just 68 yards.

Then they crushed the Panthers, at Carolina, where they were unbeaten. Forced Delhomme into 5 INT's and held WR Steve Smith to 28 yards.

Then Fitz burnt Philly to a crisp and the D shook McNabb into several bad passes.

Today will tell us. Will this be another Cinderella team, led by a suddenly glowing hot Warner and the rest of the team then feeds off that and stays hot?

Or will Pitt's great D change the momentum real quickly?

If AZ scores first, or at least has a lead, game on!

Pitt is the better team, and the 7- point spread says it.

The game may well be decided between AZ's offensive coordinator and Pitt's defensive counterpart. It will be a great chess match. Note: Just 2 years ago, both were coaches for Pitt.

Some keys: Pitt has held playoff opponents to only 44 rushing yards per game. Thus, AZ MUST be able to run the ball at least enough where Pitt can't ignore the run, pin their ears back and blitz. AZ had the 5th worst rushing game during the regular season. But in the 3 playoff games, they had 100 rushing plays and 95 passes.

They gained over 100 yards running on 2 of the 3 games.

In mid season, Edgerrin James, 30 – the "oh, oh, old" age for an RB, was benched after a bad game, for rookie Tim Hightower, who had one game over 100 yards. James came back, and gained 100 yards on 14 carries in the final season game.

During media day, they said they did "maybe 15 interviews combined."



OFF THE WALL SPORTS

As unnoticed as they may be, they could play a huge part if they can run against the venerable Steelers' No. 1 rush D. That gives Warner that ever-so-important extra second to pass.

Run well or not, James gave himself a present for just being in the SB. (Remember, he bolted the Colts the year before the won the SB.

He bought himself a Lamborghini. When asked about his "\$220,000 toy," he said, "I really don't like to drive." Say what?

Give me that car and I'd race to the nearest all girl's college!

Now, perhaps the most important aspect of the SB.

BETTING!

Jay Kornegay, at the Vegas Hilton, is the guru of sports betting.

A while back, I did an entire column on betting on the game.

There were over 100 "regular" bets. But when you add in the many insane, crazy ones – like will Kobe Bryant score more/less points in today's Lakers game than the total of the SB. Or will Chris Paul of the New Orleans Hornets have more/less assists than combined penalties. And, you can choose from a list of players, which one will commit the first infraction.

Straight game bets: which player will fumble first. First INT, first TD pass, first pass over 20 yards (both by WR and QB).

You can even bet on which team will win the coin toss. And, will it be heads or tails, and, will the winner take the ball or defer.

There are also a number of bets re NHL goals scored vs. fumbles, INT's, even vs. how many players will have to be helped off the field.

And here is a crazy. You can bet the over/under a certain number, the combined total of catches by a certain WR vs. total points scored in an Indian cricket match! True!

If Warner were to lead AZ to the win, it would most certainly be THE greatest comeback of any NFL player. For two years, he was, basically, out of football. He made the roster – practice team, one year, but that was it.

From being out of the NFL one year, to SB winner the next. No one else comes close.

One final. Pitt, Dallas and S.F are the three teams to have won 5 SB's.

Thus, I do not want Pitt to get # 6.

S.F. is the only team to win every SB they played in. And, from the early 80's to the mid 90's (even further back to some extent), the Niners and Cowboys were the hottest rivals. Being a Niner, I have ALWAYS hated 'Dem Cowboys. But for once, I'm sure both of them are AZ fans. Now I know that a great many people will be watching at those so called SB Parties. Me? Not a freakin chance. Been to a few, and most of the people don't even watch the game. All the wives are trying to look better than the other and gossip about so and so.

I am serious about the "last great sports moment until whenever," so I will have, likely only one other watching with me. No, my wife will probably be watching it upstairs in our bedroom – we have a lowly 26" flat screen HD there. But with a surround system. She says I talk – to myself – too much about the game. She hates it when I call a play and what will happen before it actually does, or point out what went right or wrong before the announcers do.

And, besides being, hopefully, a good game, the two best announcers are there: John Madden and Al Michaels.

Me? My lonely game-watching partner will be Mr. Single Malt!

You can make a wager on how many "wee drams" are consumed.

Hint: I likely will go to work Monday a wee bit late.

AZ in the big upset, 23-17.

I know, this column is way too long, but screw it. It's THE sporting event of the year. And, who the F... cares?!