

SUPER BOWL PREVIEW

Hawks' historic run

By **KENNETH O'SAILE**
Sports Opinion

The Seattle Seahawks have been the best team in the NFC. Ironically when they began playing football for the NFL in 1976, they started out as being an AFC team. But when the Houston Texans made its debut in 2002, the team moved to the NFC as part of the more recent NFL realignment.

Since then the Hawks have flourished, winning the NFC West two years in a row. The team boasts the current MVP, running back Shawn Alexander. Matt Hasselback, the Seahawks quarterback, is part of a continuing lineage of great quarterbacks coached by Mike Holmgren (Joe Montana, Steve Young, and Brett Farve).

After finishing the season 13-3, the Seahawks took the first round bye and home field advantage with him. Their first playoff game was against then the hottest team in the NFL, the Washington Redskins. The Skins were coming off an emotional win against the NFC South champions the Tampa Bay Buccaneers.

For the Seahawks to join legends by Superbowl 40, they had to win, and win

they did. They beat the Redskins convincingly 20-10 in the divisional playoffs. Ironically during the first quarter, the Skins defense knocked out Shawn Alexander with a concussion and he didn't return to the game. Fortunately this was not the 2005 Seattle Seahawks who sold their season on future "Dancing with



Rookie Lofa Tatupu looks to stop the bus and company
Photo provided by ESPN.com

the Stars" contestant Jerry Rice. This team was driven to prove its critics wrong and they did gaining their first playoff win since 1984. Darrell Jackson wound up being the eventual star of the game burning the Skins secondary with 143 receiving yards on nine catches and a touchdown.

Hasselback would contribute both on the air and on the ground for 16 of 25 passing attempts, 2 touchdowns with one of them being a running one as he slid his way to the end zone. And oh by the way, the final score was 20 to 10.

This meant that they would definitely be hosting the NFC Championship game against the Carolina Panthers. The Panthers Steve Smith torched the Bears in the divisional playoffs to earn a right to their second NFC Title game in three years. But that's as far as they would go.

In the first half alone Seattle led 20 to 7. They would go on to add to their lead by the end of the game making the final score 34-14. Bill Gates and Ichiro Suzuki weren't the only famous people in Seattle.

Hasselback was excellent again throwing 20 completions out of 28 pass attempts for two Touchdowns. Alexander had a huge game after coming off from a concussion during the previous week racking up 132 yards in 34 rushing attempts. And he also had two touchdowns on the day as well. Darrell Jackson and Jeremy Stevens each had a Hasselback touchdown pass thus proving that the Seahawks offense is an equal opportunity employer. This was also a game where the "no-name" defense of the Seahawks stepped up. Lofa Tatupu, Marquand Manuel, Michael Boulware each intercepted Panthers QB Jake Dehloimme. Rocky Bernard thought he was Rocky Balboa when he sacked Dehloimme twice in the game. It knocked Dehloimme and the rest of the team out. Even Bernard Hopkins had to be impressed with his performance.

Clearly Pittsburgh is in trouble. Jerome Bettis's bus is simply running on empty against a defense that needs to step up big. If Big Ben plans to run, his clock might be cleaned by Rocky Bernard. So I have Seattle to come sail away from Detroit with a Super Bowl win.

New age steel curtain

By **BRIAN ESTES**
Sports Opinion

Pittsburg looks to claim the title but a victory must start with quarterback Ben Roethlisberger.

Roethlisberger has been torching teams in the playoffs, throwing for 680 yards with a 68.1 percent completion rate while posting a 124.8 quarterback rating which leading the playoffs best for this season.

Pittsburgh's front line, which boasts Pro Bowlers guard Alan Faneca and center Jeff Hartings, will excel at picking up Seattle's blitzes, which in turn will open up the passing lanes so Roethlisberger will be able to deliver the ball to wide receivers Hines Ward, Antwaan Randle El, and tight end Heath Miller.

Marcus Trufant and Seattle's 25th ranked pass defense is going to have a much more difficult time slowing down the threesome of Ward, who tallied 975 receiving yards and 11 touchdowns this season, Miller, who scored six touchdowns this year, and the explosive Randle-El.

Don't make the mistake of thinking that the Steelers are one-dimensional on offense. Pittsburgh boasts the number five rushing attack in the league, powered by Willie Parker's 1202 rushing yards and Jerome Bettis's nine touchdowns.

On defense, it is vital that Pittsburgh finds a way to put pressure on Hasselback, and if they do not the Steelers have no chance to win.

Fortunately, blitzing may be Pittsburgh's greatest strength. The offensive coordinators that Pittsburg faced have found their quarterback under pressure. Carson Palmer of the Bengals tore the ACL in his knee and was done on the first drive, Jake Plummer was sacked three times and was forced into four turnovers, and mighty Peyton Manning was sacked five times by the relentless Steeler defense.

Leading the charge is All-Pro linebacker Joey Porter, who recorded 10.5 sacks in the regular season. Matt Hasselback will have a difficult time trying to breathe when pressured by linebackers, James Farrior who recorded 119 tackles this season and Larry Foote with 102 tackles.

All in all, Porter, Farrior, and defensive end Brett Kiesel have combined for 7.5 sacks this postseason.

Seahawks wide-out Darrell Jackson has had two scorching playoff performances, racking up a total of 218 yards. This trend has to end if the Steelers hope to win.

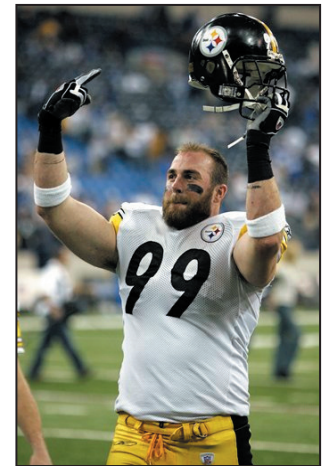
Jackson will have a tough time getting past electrifying All-Pro strong safety Troy Polamalu, who famously had a potential game clinching interception against Indianapolis wiped out by a replay review.

Polamalu has recorded 91 tackles, three sacks and two interceptions along with a forced fumble, two recoveries, and a defensive touchdown during the season.

MVP Shaun Alexander has had a history of turning in poor performances in the playoffs.

He did run for 132 yards against the Panthers, but will have no luck against a Steeler rush defense which ranks third in the league. The Broncos' high octane rushing attack put up a measly 97 yards against the Steelers in the AFC Championship Game.

Pittsburgh's defense has held opposing ball carriers to only 3.4 yards per carry, best in the league. Pittsburgh ranks third in scoring defense and fourth in total defense.



Brett Kiesel will look to smash Hasselbeck.

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