

Steelers are back in white

Coach's choice of jerseys goes against tradition

By ALAN ROBINSON
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

PITTSBURGH

To coach Bill Cowher, the Pittsburgh Steelers simply look right in white.

The Steelers will buck years of tradition and wear their white away uniforms in the Super Bowl against Seattle, even though they are designated by the NFL as the home team and could wear their more imposing black jersey tops.

The black jerseys and gold pants are the Steelers' traditional look, and numerous sports teams have switched to black uniforms in recent years because they believe it creates a more intimidating presence.

Cowher made the choice by himself and without consulting with ownership, saying, "We're not playing at Heinz Field, so, in my mind, it's an away game."

The Steelers' unprecedented success as a road team no doubt factored into Cowher's decision



SUPER BOWL

Seattle Seahawks (15-3)
vs. Pittsburgh Steelers (13-6)

Time: 6:30 p.m. Feb. 5

Where: Ford Field in Detroit

Early line: Pittsburgh by 3½

TV: WRTV-Channel 6

Radio: WNDE-1260 AM

to wear white for the fourth consecutive game.

The Steelers are the only sixth-seeded team to reach the Super Bowl and the first to knock off the No. 1, No. 2 and No. 3 teams in a conference to get there. They have won in successive weeks at Cincinnati, Indianapolis and Denver.

The Steelers also will go against another tradition by not flying to Detroit until Monday. Normally, teams travel to the Super Bowl site on the Sunday before the game.

With Pittsburgh located so close to Detroit, Cowher said there was no reason to go any earlier since the first big Super Bowl-related event is Tuesday's media day.

But it was Cowher's decision to wear white that caused the biggest stir in a town where it's difficult to drive past more than one or two houses without seeing a black-and-gold Terrible Towel or banner.

Cowher became perplexed at the constant questioning about the issue at his weekly news conference, finally saying, "You want to know what shoes I'm wearing, too?"

"I didn't think it was that big a deal what jersey color you're wearing," Cowher said. "Maybe that's just me, OK? To me, if you're not playing at Heinz Field, it's an away game. I think anyone can understand that rationale. If it's a sensitive issue to people, I'm sorry."

Sensitive issue, maybe. But could it be superstition?

"We've been playing well the last three weeks on the road, and this is another game on the road; I don't know if that's superstitious," he said.

Uniform issues aside, Cowher effectively revealed the Steelers' theme for the next two weeks, and it's a familiar one: "We ain't done nothing yet."

Despite the Steelers' 3-for-3 AFC road sweep, he said any Super Bowl finalist's season is defined by what it does in this

game and not how it gets there.

"The deal isn't done yet," he said. "This is going to be our toughest challenge. Seattle is playing at an extremely high level, and we haven't accomplished anything yet."

"That's the thing to keep in mind. ... it all can change in one play, one quarter, one bad game."

The Steelers know all about that, having lost four AFC title games at home and a Super Bowl in the past dozen seasons, gaining them a reputation of being a team that folds under pressure.

While this road run may be altering that theory, Cowher understands it will be stamped on his team again, especially since the Steelers are favored against Seattle after being underdogs the past two weeks.

"Nobody remembers that you lost a Super Bowl; they remember who won a Super Bowl," he said.

Cowher did reveal one other thought he had after the Steelers ended a streak of three consecutive losses in the AFC title game by beating Denver 34-17 Sunday.

"Thank goodness I'm not going back to Hawaii," he said.

The losing coach in each conference championship game handles the Pro Bowl teams, so Cowher has coached the AFC four times since the 1994 season.



The Steelers' Brett Keisel celebrates after Pittsburgh beat the Broncos 34-17 in the AFC Championship game in Denver on Sunday.

Holmgren wants Seahawks to savor trip to Super Bowl

By CHUCK FINDER
PITTSBURGH POST-GAZETTE

KIRKLAND, Wash.

Mike Holmgren knows this game. He knows how to play this game. And how not to.

Before anyone brings up that business about lying down and letting John Elway of Denver score the touchdown that ultimately vanquished his Green Bay Packers in Super Bowl XXXII, preventing them from getting back-to-back world championships, the coach who is steering these nouveau-riche Seattle Seahawks into their first big bowl still carries regrets about his most recent time there, Jan. 25, 1998.

"We played the two games in a row, we won the first one (against New England) and lost the second one to Denver," Holmgren was recalling Monday, the day after his Seahawks (15-3) thumped Carolina,

34-14, in the NFC Championship game and earned their wings to Detroit Feb. 5 for a Super Bowl XL date with the AFC-champion Steelers (14-5).

"It was a good football game. But I thought ... it was hard to get my guys to believe that it was going to be a tough game," Holmgren added. "I tried to be nice. I tried to kick them in the rear end. I tried everything. Our head wasn't right, looking back. And we lost a close game (31-24)."

"We're not in the same spot. Motivating them will be a different set of challenges. But, hopefully, I've learned from that."

One of the lessons from 1998: Breathe more. Smell ... well, whatever Detroit and Ford Field have to offer. Revel in America's biggest sporting event.

It's a message Holmgren, a coach who considered retiring last January amid an illustrious 141-85 career delivered in a meeting to his seventh and by far most successful Seahawks club yet.

Heck, this franchise hadn't won a play-

off game since 1984, dropping three under Holmgren, until it coasted by Washington and Carolina the past fortnight. He's also preaching caution and concentration.

"I've enjoyed this," Holmgren said, thinking of Qwest Field in the game's waning moments and the reaction around normally sedate Seattle on Sunday night. "I've reflected more this time. That was pretty neat (Sunday) night, looking up and seeing the stadium still full."

"While I told the players what to expect in Detroit and ... of the Super Bowl, we have one more game to play. I (said), 'This week will be like nothing you've ever been through in your life.'"

Quarterback Matt Hasselbeck added: "It was really a comforting feeling, having him get up and talk about, 'Well, when I was in this Super Bowl, we did this, when I was in that Super Bowl.'"

To avoid Motor City madness, Holmgren planned to put the team through two-a-day sessions this week.

Again, the coach knows from Super Bowl XXXI in New Orleans and Super Bowl XXXII in San Diego. He directed the Seattle players down their Detroit checklist: tickets (he said they'd hear from cousins they never knew they had), hotel rooms, media obligations, family and that there is practice.

"We have to have a good practice week this week," Holmgren said. "We get squeezed in there (in Detroit). So we'll get most of the work done (in Seattle)."

Holmgren planned to have a few Super Bowl veterans speak to their Seahawks mates, vets such as linebacker Jamie Sharper of Baltimore XXXV, center Robbie Tobeck of Atlanta XXXIII, defensive end Grant Wistrom of St. Louis XXXIV and defensive tackle Chartric Darby of Tampa Bay XXXVII.



Seattle Seahawks head coach Mike Holmgren holds up the trophy after his team beat the Carolina Panthers 34-14 in the NFC Championship game Sunday.

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