

HOW WE SEE IT

Members of the Daily Journal staff predict the outcome of the Super Bowl:

Paul Hoffman (8-2)

Special publications editor

So, here I am faced with the heavy burden of picking the winner of Super Bowl XL (Xtra Large). This task has really been weighing on my mind. Too bad Vegas hasn't installed either team as a heavy favorite. I'd know which of these NFL heavyweights to pick, then.



HOFFMAN

On one side of the scales, you have Seattle coach Mike Holmgren, a man with some girth who won the big game with Green Bay nearly a decade ago. On the other side of the scales, we find Jerome "The Bus" Bettis, who is looking more like a double-tractor-semitrailer these days. Dude, what have you been eating?

Ignore the fact that Pittsburgh is a No. 6 seed. The Steelers came up big late in the year after Big Ben returned from injury. Having the NFL MVP in their backfield will be huge for the Seahawks.

We're going to give more weight to the team that piles on the poundage. Not including idiot kickers and their punting cousins, Seattle's players weigh in at an average of almost 14 pounds (and 14 points) heavier than the Steelers.

Seahawks 31, Steelers 17

Jeff Decker (6-4)

Assistant sports editor

Everything about this Super Bowl has an old feel. The game is in Detroit, which back in the old days was a big city; now it's the fastest-shrinking place in the United States. Aretha Franklin is going to sing the national anthem. She's only a couple of months younger than my mom. And the Rolling Stones will perform at halftime. Back when I was in high school, my friends and I used to make fun of the Rolling Stones for being a bunch of old geezers. And I haven't been in high school for 27 years!



DECKER

Though they're not exactly the Steel Curtain, the Steelers are throwbacks of sorts. They're tough, just like their coach, Bill Cowher, who appropriately enough has been with the same team longer than any other NFL coach. But even he doesn't go back 27 years.

Steelers 24, Seahawks 17

John Groth (5-5)

Staff writer

Pittsburgh has defeated each of its play-off opponents with its defense. The Steelers have smothered their opponents. They forced turnovers in Cincinnati and Denver, making average quarterbacks Jon Kitna and Jake Plummer look just that, and turned Colts quarterback Peyton Manning into an average QB for three quarters.



GROTH

Seattle shut down Steve Smith last week. But he was really the Panthers' only target or force. Pittsburgh can beat teams passing or rushing.

Yes, the Seahawks did go 14-2 and have dominated in the regular and post-seasons. And yes, they haven't gotten enough respect. They don't have the flashy players or the hype the Steelers have, and I like that about them. They just get the job done and go quietly about their work.

Matt Hasselbeck is a good quarterback. Ben Roethlisberger is on the verge of becoming great. Add to that, he's got a solid defense around him. That's why I'm giving the nod to the "team of destiny."

Steelers 27, Seahawks 17

James

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE B1)

James made the remarks in Detroit after a taping session Thursday night with the NFL Network. The AP left a telephone message seeking comment with James' agent, Drew Rosenhaus.

Polian said Friday the team had not given James any indication of its plans because the Colts' coaches and personnel staff had just finished their meetings.

"Now, we've got to get to the drawing board, so to speak, and decide what we're going to do in terms of applying the franchise tag, if such is the case, how much money were going to have to spend," Polian said. "And all of that is really in suspended animation because of the lack of a collective bargaining agreement."

Polian indicated last month that the Colts had placed a higher priority on retaining receiver Reggie Wayne, another potential unrestricted free agent, than James.

James, whom the Colts made the fourth player taken in the 1999 draft, rushed for 1,506 yards, caught 44 passes for 337 yards and scored 14 touchdowns this past season after the Colts kept him by using the franchise tag, a one-year deal that delayed free agency by paying him more than \$8 million.

Polian gave Rosenhaus permission to seek a trade for James last spring, but one wasn't made.

Now, with Wayne, defensive lineman Raheem Brock, kicker Mike Vanderjagt, defensive tackle Larry Triplett and linebacker David Thornton also among the 13 players who will become unrestricted free agents, there might not be enough money to keep everyone.

Hasselbeck: The anti-Roethlisberger

By DAVID NAYLOR
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

DETROIT

There have been times when Super Bowl XL seems geared to be a coronation for Ben Roethlisberger, the Pittsburgh Steelers' quarterback, who has had a charmed life during his brief career. Already the darling of the NFL, the 23-year-old has the chance to become the youngest quarterback to lead his team to Super Bowl victory.

His glittery presence has largely overshadowed that of Matt Hasselbeck this week in Detroit, even though the Seattle Seahawks' quarterback is going to his second Pro Bowl in three years, led the league's top scoring team in the regular season and produced an overall record of 15-3.

There is, of course, the fact that Roethlisberger plays for the Steelers, one of a handful of NFL teams with a national following and a regular presence on television. Seahawks fans, conversely, are confined mostly to Seattle, and the team's exposure in the Eastern time zone has been limited by its mostly mediocre play through the years.

But Roethlisberger's story is right out of a Hollywood script, so rare that it's barely believable. A first-round draft pick in 2004, Big Ben waited all of two games before becoming Pittsburgh's starting quarterback a year ago, winning his first 14 games before losing last year's AFC title game. Now, at the end of his second season, he's in the Super Bowl.

Hasselbeck? Well, let's just call him the anti-Roethlisberger, a player who has toiled in the relative anonymity of the Pacific Northwest, where he's slowly but surely earned respect, at least from teammates, if not from the public.

Hosts of television talk shows may still not know his name (Jay Leno couldn't name the Seattle Seahawks' quarterback



Seattle Seahawks quarterback Matt Hasselbeck stretches during the team's practice in Allen Park, Mich., on Friday. The Seahawks will take on the Pittsburgh Steelers in Super Bowl XL on Sunday.

when Terry Bradshaw was recently a guest on his show), but a win against the Steelers on Sunday would go a long way toward changing that.

Hasselbeck's long, slow rise from obscurity began when the Green Bay Packers selected him in the sixth round of the 1998 draft, relegating him to the practice roster at the back of the line behind Brett Favre.

"I know that when I got drafted to Green Bay, I felt really fortunate," Hasselbeck said. "I felt I could learn a great deal from the coaches there, Mike (Holmgren) being one of them."

The next year, however, Holmgren left

the Packers for Seattle. But after helping to develop stars Joe Montana and Steve Young when he was in San Francisco, and Favre in Green Bay, Holmgren wanted Hasselbeck for his next project.

"What Matt and Brett have in common (is) the competitive fire, the spirit of playing the position, the stubbornness, the intellect it takes to play the position, the ability to lead," Holmgren said.

So in 2001, Holmgren reached back to Green Bay and traded for Hasselbeck, who became the starter despite having thrown only 29 career passes.

It didn't go well. In his first season, Hass-

elbeck played through injuries while starting 12 games, throwing just seven touchdown passes vs. eight interceptions.

Then, early in 2002, Holmgren benched him in favor of veteran backup Trent Dilfer, who had joined the Seahawks the previous season after winning a Super Bowl with the Baltimore Ravens.

It seemed Hasselbeck operated a little too independently for Holmgren's liking, a message that got through only in the benching.

"He realized when he lost his starting position that he didn't have it all together," Seattle quarterback coach Jim Zorn said. "We decided, 'Let's concentrate on what we do here and not what you think we should do.' I think those commitments set him up to be successful."

Looking back, Hasselbeck believes it was Dilfer, whom he replaced because of an injury to regain the starter's job later in 2002, who helped him turn around his career.

"It's kind of ironic that the guy who was in direct competition with me is the guy who helped me the most," Hasselbeck said. "Trent taught me a lot about being a good teammate, all those kind of things."

"The guy had just won the Super Bowl, but his team went out to get someone they thought was better who didn't turn out to be better. Trent came in as my backup and was the most supportive guy on the team, happy for me, rooting for me, giving me encouragement."

"It wasn't anything Trent said or did, necessarily. But kind of just watching how he handled game day, practice, all of those situations. He seemed to defuse the situation, and I seemed to make it a little worse."

While there have been growing pains during the years since, including a sideline argument during a game in San Francisco, the quarterback and the coach now understand one another. It has taken time, not like a story for Hollywood.

Teams

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE B1)

is loaded with Steelers of that era.

Not much has changed dozens of years later. The Rooney family (Art then, his son Dan now) run the Steelers like, well, a family business.

And with such corporate giants as Arthur Blank (Falcons), Randy Lerner (Browns) and, yes, Seattle's Paul Allen on the NFL ownership roster, it is refreshing to see a family business thrive.

"How long that family has owned that team, it's a beautiful thing," says Ruskell, who also has worked for the Buccaneers and Falcons. "That's the way the league was early on. It's absolutely the model I wish every NFL team would be run by."

Rooney, not one to seek the spotlight even though he is among the most powerful men in the league, has had only Noll and Bill Cowher as coaches. Cowher is in his 14th consecutive season in charge, pretty much unheard of in any professional sport and particularly in the NFL.

Throughout Cowher's tenure and Noll's before him, Rooney has stuck to one approach. He hires what he considers experts in their field, then lets them be experts.

"I get involved a lot, but not on an everyday basis," he says. "We have the right people: Kevin Colbert (director of football operations), my son Art (president). They do an excellent job. Just look at the team."

"I'd like to be the guy to take credit that I took Ben Roethlisberger in the draft," Rooney adds with a sly smile, "I think about a thousand people made that decision."

On this season's roster, the Steelers actually have a fair share of free agents. But that's unavoidable in the current NFL.

Where Pittsburgh doesn't get fooled, just as New England didn't during its run of three titles in four years that ended this season, is in the big-money game.

SEATTLE SEAHAWKS (15-3) vs. PITTSBURGH STEELERS (14-5) at Detroit, 6 p.m. Sunday, WRTV-Channel 6

Opening line: Steelers by 3½
Record vs. spread: Seahawks 11-6-1; Steelers 12-7

Series record: Seahawks lead 8-6
Most recent meeting: Seahawks 23, Steelers 16, Nov. 2, 2003, at Seattle
Most recent game: Seahawks beat Panthers 34-14; Steelers beat Broncos 34-17

Seahawks offense: Overall (2), rush (3), pass (13)
Seahawks defense: Overall (16T), rush (5), pass (25)
Steelers offense: Overall (15T), rush (5), pass (24)
Steelers defense: Overall (4), rush (3), pass (16)

Key matchup: Pittsburgh QB Ben Roethlisberger vs. Seattle's pass defense. Seattle won't be able to concentrate on one receiver this time. Roethlisberger has more weapons than Carolina's Jake Delhomme. He has found five different players in the end zone in the postseason. Roethlisberger has matured this season and, at 23, he'll be the second-youngest quarterback to start a Super Bowl, 213 days older than Miami's Dan Marino was in 1985. Steelers are 26-4 in games he has started. Roethlisberger has a postseason passer rating of 124.8, completing 49 of 72 passes (68.1 percent) for 680 yards, seven touchdowns and one interception. The Steelers, one of the purest rushing teams in the NFL, increased their aver-

age in yards passing during the playoffs to 217.7 compared to 182.9 during the regular season. Expect the Steelers to continue to throw the ball to set up the run. It's a formula that's knocked off the top three seeds in the AFC playoffs.

Seattle gave up 18 touchdowns and 222.4 yards per game in the air during the regular season.

Streaks, stats and notes: Seattle was the top seed in the NFC and is in its first Super Bowl. ... Holmgren is the fifth coach in NFL history to lead two teams to the Super Bowl (Green Bay 1997-98). ... NFL MVP RB Shaun Alexander set NFL single-season record with 28 TDs and led league with 1,880 yards rushing, ninth-highest total in NFL history. The league MVP has played in that season's Super Bowl 21 times in the 39-year history of the game. Ten of those 21 won the Super Bowl, and six also became Super Bowl MVPs. ... Seattle finished second in the NFL with 369.7 yards per game on offense. ... Joe Jurevicius had career-best 10 TD catches this year. Jurevicius averages 20.75 yards per catch (12-249) in eight career playoff games, with two TDs. ... Jerryamy Stevens set club record for TE's with 554 yards receiving (45 catches). ... WR Darrell Jackson is the Seahawks' all-time leader with 32 postseason catches (404 yards, 101 yards per game). ... Rocky Bernard ranked second among NFL DTs with 8½ sacks. ... LB Leroy Hill ranked

third among NFL rookies with 7½ sacks. ... Seattle ranked fifth (94.4 yards per game) against the run.

Pittsburgh's Bill Cowher and Seattle's Mike Holmgren have the longest continuous coaching tenures in the league. Both started in 1992; Cowher with the Steelers and Holmgren with Green Bay. ... One Steeler, little-used CB Willie Williams, has had Super Bowl experience, with the Pittsburgh team that lost to Dallas in 1996. That's fewest of any team in league. The Seahawks have five who went with other teams: C Robbie Tobeck, P Tom Rouen, WR Joe Jurevicius, DE Grant Wistrom and DT Chuck Darby. Pittsburgh is the first sixth seed to reach the Super Bowl. ... Steelers are the second team (New England in 1985) to win three straight road games to make it to the Super Bowl. Pittsburgh is 9-2 on the road this season. Until this season, the Steelers had won only two road playoff games in 30 years, none under Cowher. ... Steelers are averaging 29 points in their past eight games. ... In nine road starts this season (including postseason), QB Ben Roethlisberger has 14 TDs vs. four INTs, completing 129 of 194 passes (66.5 percent). ... Steelers have a seven-game winning streak. ... Joey Porter led NFL LBs with 10½ sacks, tying career high. ... WR Hines Ward had 11 TD catches, tied for second in AFC. ... Pittsburgh is 27-18 in the postseason.

When the Steelers have gone for free agents, those players generally have been young — Jerome Bettis in 1996, Jeff Hartings in '01, James Farrior in '02 — and fit the team concept.

Bettis is the bruising running back and goal-line master nearly every good Steelers team has had. Hartings is a smart, versatile blocker who switched from guard when he was with the Lions to center and became a Pro Bowler. Farrior, an outside linebacker with the Jets, is a fierce hitter on the inside of Pittsburgh's 3-4 defense.

But it's through the draft where the Steelers have been most productive, leading to six AFC Championship game appearances since Cowher took over.

Such stars as Hines Ward, Alan Faneca, Joey Porter, Casey Hampton, Antwaan Randle El,

Troy Polamalu and, of course, Roethlisberger, all were selected in the third round or higher.

"We're happy with the way we operate, and if it's successful it will continue," says Colbert, a Pittsburgh native who revered the Steel Curtain teams. "They've been doing it this way a lot of years with success. The philosophy was built, and they set their standards by winning all those Super Bowls, and you understand that when you come to Pittsburgh."

"I don't know how you could ever have a better situation, working for the best organization in sports in your hometown. You look around the league and see how some other teams operate

and you really appreciate what you have."

It's what the Seahawks would like to have: a string of success stretching into its fourth decade.

So Ruskell, coach Mike Holmgren and their staffs — and, naturally, Allen, one of the world's richest men — look at the Rooney family business and try to replicate it.

After last season, the Seahawks had some difficult choices to make. Holmgren, Ruskell and vice president Mike Reinfeldt sensed a need for changes after consecutive first-round playoff defeats.

"While we had some good players, we were not getting that type of leadership we needed in my

opinion," says Holmgren, who saw that trait from the likes of Joe Montana and Ronnie Lott when he was coaching in San Francisco, and from Reggie White and Brett Favre when Holmgren took Green Bay to two Super Bowls.

"And it took us a long time, some might say too long, to get that together," Holmgren added. "Now that's together."

"It was ominous since there were 16 guys who were free agents ... and you don't want to get into situations like that, particularly when three or four of them are Walter Jones, Shaun Alexander, Matt Hasselbeck, and people like that. Once we came up with a strategy of how to go about it and the order in which to go about it, some things fell into place for us."

"It's targeting who your core is, who you are going to build a team around, and then making it possible so you can sign those guys," he said.

Jones and Alexander are among the more enlightened draft selections Seattle has made. Two starting linebackers, Lofa Tatupu and Leroy Hill, are rookies. Guard Steve Hutchinson, soon to be a free agent, receiver Darrell Jackson, cornerback Marcus Trufant and safety Michael Boulware were high picks.

And very much like the Steelers and Patriots, the Seahawks have prospered with second-level free agents who are not as costly but, often, just as productive as the rich guys. Indeed, the entire starting defensive line is composed of non-draftees.

Ruskell, who came aboard a year ago to handle personnel, not surprisingly invokes the Steelers again when evaluating how the Seahawks' organization got things right.

"The key was to be like the best organizations, like Pittsburgh; just get everybody focused on their roles," he says. "They rolled up their sleeves and said, 'Let's get to work.'"

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