

SUPER BOWL XL: PITTSBURGH 21, SEATTLE 10



Steelers coach Bill Cowher celebrates with quarterback Ben Roethlisberger after the second-year quarterback picked up a first down in the fourth quarter of the Super Bowl.

By Alan Robinson
The Associated Press

Steelers win one for the thumb — and the Jaw

DETROIT

Finally, Bill Cowher won the big one, and in the hardest way possible. Not only did his Pittsburgh Steelers win one for the thumb, they won one for the Jaw.

The Steelers' jut-jawed and oft-intense coach had made a career of losing championship games, almost all of them at home, five in all, four in AFC championship games in Pittsburgh since January 1995.

But given the hardest road possible to an NFL championship, his Steelers became the first team to win three road playoff games and then the Super Bowl by beating

Seattle 21-10 on Sunday. It was the franchise's fifth Super Bowl title, the long elusive One for The Thumb they had sought since the days of Terry Bradshaw, Franco Harris and Jack Lambert in January 1980. After they did, Cowher began crying on the sideline.

Wearing their lucky white road uniforms even though they were designated as the home team, the Steelers finished off their unprecedented sweep of the top three seeded teams in the AFC and the top-seeded team in the NFC.

And the coach who got so much grief for being out-coached twice in AFC title games by the Patriots' Bill Belichick, for not having his teams prepared or inspired for title games clearly did the best coaching job of his career under the toughest circumstances.

Cowher did so by invoking such diverse figures as Christopher Columbus and Jerome Bettis, and by putting the ball squarely in the hands of his inexperienced second-year quarterback, Ben Roethlisberger. That move clearly went against the Steelers' long-standing philosophy of winning by the run.

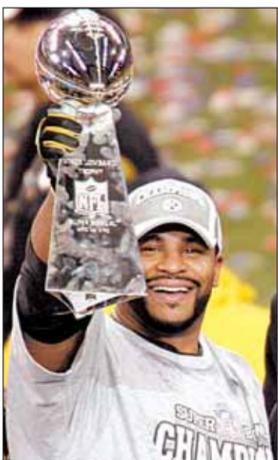
Two months ago, when the Steelers were 7-5 and needed to win their final four regular-season games merely to get into the playoffs, Cowher stood up at a team meeting and told them that the journey looked hard and tough but could be done.

He then cited Columbus' unknown journey to a new world in 1492, and how his players could chart a path never accomplished by an NFL team — a unique pep-talk blend of American history and NFL history. Intrigued, some players read up on Columbus, and some talked about "Winning one for Chris."

Later, after the Steelers won those four and started their AFC playoff sweep of Cincinnati, Indianapolis and Denver, Cowher talked of how badly he wanted Bettis, one of the greatest running backs in NFL history to get back to his hometown of Detroit and win the Super Bowl.

At the same time, his players began talking openly of winning a championship not just for The Bus, but for a coach who was No. 14 in NFL career victories but was one of the few on the list without a Super Bowl.

After 13-year career, The Bus finally pulls into garage



The Steelers' Jerome Bettis hoists the Vince Lombardi trophy after Pittsburgh won 21-10 against Seattle in the Super Bowl on Sunday.

The Associated Press

DETROIT

As grand exits go, it wasn't much. The Bus didn't win the Super Bowl for the Pittsburgh Steelers in the final game of his career. Didn't even have a lot to do with it, until he was given the ball to grind up some yards and run down the clock toward the end.

Don't believe for a minute, though, that this wasn't Jerome Bettis' game.

It was from the time he told his teammates to take him home before they went out and beat the Denver Broncos to get here. It surely was after the Steelers landed in Motor City and Bettis showed them his town.

He lumbered alone onto the field for the pregame introductions, then turned around and beckoned for his teammates to fol-

low him. He threw a block to help Ben Roethlisberger score and then walked around the end zone searching for a souvenir in the ball his quarterback had spiked.

In between, he rooted teammates on, sprinting on the field to congratulate them after big plays and giving them words of encouragement when things went bad.

When it was over, he finally had his Super Bowl championship. He celebrated on the field, while his mother — who had never missed a game since Bettis began playing football — cried and his dad celebrated in a luxury suite above.

Detroit celebrated with them, perhaps hopeful that this was a good omen of things to come in a city that so desperately wants to improve itself. It was almost as if a city whose own team is woeful had won a title through one of its own.

For his part, during all the cel-

ebrating, Bettis made his retirement official. And he left the way few athletes ever do, holding a championship trophy over his head before roaring fans in his hometown.

One for the thumb? How about one big one for the Bus?

"I'm a champion, and I think the Bus' last stop is here in Detroit," Bettis said.

Game turns on big plays

A record-setting run. A game-turning interception. A trick play that no one saw coming — until the ball landed in Hines Ward's hands.

The Pittsburgh Steelers needed every little bit of history they could get their fingers on to craft a one-for-the-books ending.

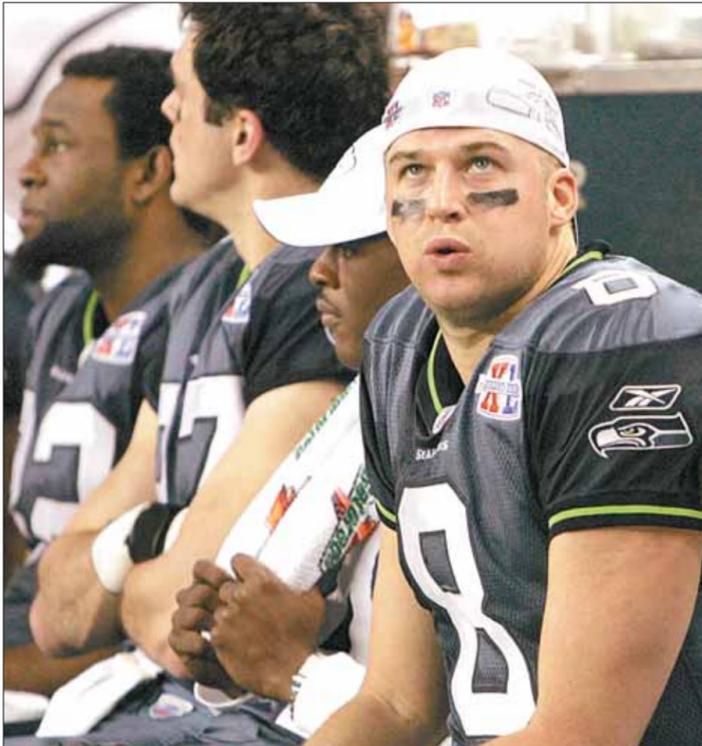
Years from now, those Terrible Towel-twirling fans will recount how with one big play after

another, the Steelers managed to get that elusive "One For The Thumb" ring, that perfect send-off to Jerome Bettis' career, and that long-awaited Super Bowl title for coach Bill Cowher.

Ward won the MVP award, highlighted by his catch on fellow wideout Antwaan Randle El — the first TD thrown by a receiver in a Super Bowl. But then Ward brought up a couple of balls he dropped.

"I think I left some plays out on the field," he said. "I could've had an even better day."

Same for Ben Roethlisberger. He got the title that set him apart — at age 23, making him the youngest quarterback to win a Super Bowl. But this one had less to do with him — and his ill-timed interception — and a lot more to do with some old-fashioned Steeler football and a little newfangled trickery.



Seattle quarterback Matt Hasselbeck looks up at the clock in the final seconds Sunday.

By Gregg Bell
The Associated Press

Seahawks lose chances, catches and Super Bowl

DETROIT

Matt Hasselbeck angrily unsnapped his chin strap with a hard flick of his right wrist. Steelers linebacker Joey Porter then added to his anger by taunting Hasselbeck from behind.

Seconds earlier, the Seahawks quarterback's wrist had flicked something worse, perhaps the worst throw of his Pro Bowl season.

A woefully overthrown pass far beyond Darrell Jackson's arms landed in Ike Taylor's near the Pittsburgh 15, killing Seattle's chance to take the lead in the fourth quarter of Sunday's Super Bowl.

But that wasn't the Seahawks' only lost opportunity in their 21-10 loss to the Steelers. It just happened to be the last one.

The Seahawks' wondrous, record-setting season ended somewhere beneath an avalanche of mistakes and missed opportunities.

Four crucial penalties. Two missed field goals by Josh Brown. Three dropped passes, all by tight end Jerramy Stevens, the co-creator of last week's only controversy with Porter. A catch on the goal line with only one foot inbounds. Two calls by the officials that Seattle will be debating all winter, spring and summer.

That mess directly resulted in 18 lost points, including a disputed Steelers touchdown — two lost first downs, 176 lost yards.

And one bitterly lost Super Bowl.

Seahawks coach Mike Holmgren, a loser for the second time in three games as a Super Bowl head coach, spent most of his frustrating night on the sideline expressionless or with his arms crossed across his chest.

But Holmgren, denied in becoming the first coach to win Super Bowls with two teams, was in full boil late in the second quarter.

He and his staff still believe Pittsburgh quarterback Ben Roethlisberger did not get the ball to touch the goal-line plane on his 1-yard score with 1:55 left in the second quarter that put the Seahawks behind for good, 7-3.

Referee Bill Leavy upheld the call after a replay review. Holmgren then upbraided Leavy on his way off the field at halftime.

Holmgren walked over to Leavy, a fifth-year referee calling his first Super Bowl, and could be seen angrily telling him, "It wasn't even close." But the rest of the Seahawks' night was.

The Seahawks had three crucial penalties in the first half, which cost them 69 yards, a first down and a touchdown.

The second half brought more Seahawks frustration.

Officials flagged first-year starting right tackle Sean Locklear for holding when Stevens did finally catch a pass, a 17-yard grab at the Steelers 2 with 12:11 left and Seattle trailing 14-10. On the next play, Casey Hampton bowled through Pro Bowl blockers Robbie Tobeck and Steve Hutchinson for a sack.

HOW THE GAME WAS WON

Here's a look at how the Seahawks and Steelers reached the final score of Sunday's Super Bowl:

First quarter



Seattle receiver Darrell Jackson is tackled by Pittsburgh Steelers safety Tyrone Carter.

Second quarter



Steelers quarterback Ben Roethlisberger looks for a signal from officials after scoring the only touchdown of the first half.

DETROIT — Talk about a mistake-filled Super Bowl.

That's what the world saw Sunday when the Pittsburgh Steelers won their first title in 26 years by beating Seattle 21-10.

Mistakes?

To put it simply, the Steelers won because the Seahawks made more errors, far more.

They included three dropped passes by tight end Jerramy Stevens, who spent last week as the party of the second part in a woeful match with Pittsburgh's Joey Porter.

They also included a series of damaging penalties at the worst possible times, including a holding call on right tackle Sean Locklear after an 18-yard completion that would have given the Seahawks a first and goal at the Pittsburgh 1 early in the fourth period and a chance to go ahead 17-14.

And those came after a first half in which Seattle lost 10 to 14 points because of mistakes.

In fact, while Pittsburgh had two superbly executed long touchdowns — a Super Bowl record 75-yard touchdown run by Willie Parker and a 43-yard reverse pass from Antwaan Randle El to Hines Ward — this was a game Seattle lost as much as the Steelers won.

Mistakes?

The Seahawks were only in the game because Pittsburgh's Ben Roethlisberger made a huge error of his own, underthrowing what should have been a TD pass to Cedrick Wilson in the third quarter. Instead, Kelly Herndon took the underthrown ball back 76 yards, leading to a Seattle touchdown that made it 14-10 when it should have been 21-3.

Start with the first half, when the Seahawks controlled play but went off trailing 7-3.

• Darrell Jackson was called for offensive pass interference for pushing off Chris Hope on what would have been a 16-yard completion from Matt Hasselbeck. The call was a little ticky-tacky, but it was a penalty.

• A holding penalty on Chris Gray that negated an 18-yard completion from Hasselbeck to Jackson that would have given the Seahawks a first down at the Pittsburgh 23.

• A 34-yard punt return by Peter Warrick to the Pittsburgh 46 was called back by a holding penalty on Etric Pruitt. Although to be fair, there's nothing unusual about a penalty on any punt or kick in any game?

• Finally, some dubious clock management and play calling that forced Josh Brown into trying a 54-yard field goal late in the half. It was wide right, so the Steelers led 7-3 at intermission despite being outplayed for most of the half.

But that only was a preface for the mistakes in the second half, the Roethlisberger interception, a couple of more Stevens drops, then finally, the decisive penalty on Locklear.

Third quarter



Steelers running back Willie Parker runs for a 75-yard touchdown, the longest from scrimmage in Super Bowl history, during the third quarter.

Fourth quarter



The Steelers' Hines Ward scores on a pass from wide receiver Antwaan Randle El during the fourth quarter.