

Steelers seeking self-control

Cowher defends team's behavior in playoff victory

By ALAN ROBINSON
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

PITTSBURGH

Pittsburgh Steelers coach Bill Cowher often talks about walking a fine line, usually to describe the tiny differences that separate winning from losing.

This time, he is concerned his team might have stepped over that imaginary line during a taunting-filled playoff victory Sunday in Cincinnati.

Cowher on Tuesday defended defensive lineman Kimo von Oelhoffen's hit that sidelined Bengals quarterback Carson Palmer with a badly injured left knee, and the coach said there is no basis to call the Steelers a dirty team.

"No one felt worse about it than Kimo or, really, our football team," Cowher said. "We have a lot of respect for that football team."

However, Cowher acknowledged some players lost their composure during the 31-17 victory, which featured several shouting matches and a visible air of tension following Palmer's injury.

Cowher said the Steelers can't afford such lapses in judgment during Sunday's divisional playoff game in Indianapolis.

Cowher didn't name any names but undoubtedly was referring to All-Pro safety Troy Polamalu, who drew a costly 15-yard unsportsmanlike conduct penalty for jamming a football in the face of Bengals center Rich Bramham. The penalty came after a third-down incompletion, and the Bengals took advantage of it to score a touchdown and take a 17-7 lead.

"There's a fine line between going in there and being emotional and allowing it to have an adverse effect, which I think happened to us last



Pittsburgh Steelers head coach Bill Cowher yells at the field officials during their 31-17 win against the Cincinnati Bengals in their wild-card playoff game Sunday in Cincinnati. The Steelers will visit Indianapolis for a divisional playoff game Sunday.

week," Cowher said. "We settled down more in the second half of that game, but we lost our composure at times."

"I don't want us to lose our emotion, but we can't lose our composure. There's a fine line, and at times we kind of crossed that, but we have to play with that same emotion, that same level of desperation or else we are not going to move on."

No doubt aware some players were watching his televised news conference on their day off, Cowher challenged them to play their best game of the season, something he said was a must to beat the Colts.

The Steelers lost in Indianapolis 26-7 on Nov. 28 despite limiting the Colts to one touchdown during the final three-plus quarters following an 80-yard

Peyton Manning to Marvin Harrison touchdown pass on the Colts' first play from scrimmage.

The Steelers also were bothered by the crowd noise inside the RCA Dome, which led to five false-start penalties.

Cowher's decision to attempt an inside kick to start the second half also proved costly when the Colts recovered, giving them a short field on a drive that ended with Manning's 12-yard scoring pass to Bryan Fletcher.

"We're playing the No. 1 seed in the AFC and in many people's eyes the No. 1 team in the National Football League," Cowher said. "We're going to have to play so much better than we played the last time we played them, and we're going to have to play better than we played last week."

"It's going to take a flawless effort on our part. We're going to have to bring everything we have and more."

To Cowher, that means limiting turnovers and getting the same balance between the run and the pass the Steelers have had while averaging 29.5 points in their past six games.

They also need more mistake-free play from Ben Roethlisberger, who has been intercepted only twice during the Steelers' five-game winning streak.

The Steelers don't seem to mind that they'll go into Sunday's game as the underdog.

"When you're in a hostile environment, and you're dealing with the finality of the playoffs, you're the underdog. You are. Face it," Cowher said. "We understand that going in."

• Edge

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE B1)

the final six quarters before the playoffs began.

He still led the league in first downs (115), rushed for 1,506 yards, caught 44 passes for another 337 yards and scored 14 touchdowns. And he continues to be, at least in the eyes of Peyton Manning, the most valuable blocking back in the league.

Despite the workload, James insists he will have fresh legs Sunday against Pittsburgh.

"I think I have everything together," he said. "I know how to play now. In other years, I'd come back the next day after a game and be sore. Now I don't feel sore. I've got my health, and I feel good."

He's performed like it, too. In the first meeting with Pittsburgh

"I think I have everything together. ... I've got my health, and I feel good."

Edgerrin James
Indianapolis Colts running back on being rested for the playoffs

this season, James ran for 124 yards and became the first back to top 100 yards against the Steelers in 23 games. As usual, though, James' proficiency isn't measured in numbers alone.

A deceptive play-action fake on the Colts' first play led to an 80-yard touchdown pass from Manning to Marvin Harrison, and his grinding runs in the second half helped the Colts (14-2) seal the victory.

Coach Bill Cowher knows that if the Steelers (12-5) are to stop the Colts on Sunday, they must slow James.

"You've got to be careful, but of all

the weapons that they have Edgerrin James is the one guy," Cowher said Tuesday. "He makes some unbelievable runs. We had him pinned a couple times in the first game, and the next thing you look up and he's gained one yard or two yards."

James craves the ball, even in practice. But through the years, he's learned some valuable lessons about taking care of his body: Run over defenders when he has them off-balance, go down when necessary and use the sideline when you can. He'll even take an occasional break.

But the more the Colts ask him to do, the less James seems to tire.

"He's just a different guy," coach Tony Dungy said. "He likes to run the football, he takes care of himself, and he trains awfully hard."

"Last year, we had four games in 19 days or something, and one time I said, 'I'll take you out so you're fresh for the next game.' He said, 'No, I'll be fine.'"

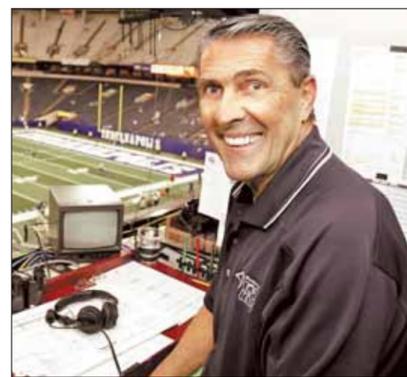
The only real complication in James' football life is the one question he'd rather avoid: whether he'll be back in Indy next year.

James was designated the Colts franchise player in the offseason, signing a one-year deal worth a little more than \$8 million. This year, James, receiver Reggie Wayne, linebacker David Thornton and defensive end Raheem Brock, all starters, could become unrestricted free agents.

If that happens, the Colts may have to choose who to keep, and Bill Pollan's decision to let agent Drew Rosenhaus shop James in March may indicate which direction the Colts will go.

Rather than pout, though, the fun-loving James has produced what may be his best season.

"I'm never going to beg or that stuff, I'm going to go with the flow," James said. "If you want to do something, cool. If not, cool. I grew up being taught to make the best out of any situation so whatever happens, happens."



St. Louis Rams radio announcer Jack Snow, shown before the team's game against the Colts in Indianapolis on Oct. 17, died Monday. He was 62.

Rams receiver, radio announcer Snow dies at 62

By JIM SALTER
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

ST. LOUIS

Jack Snow could always be counted on to make big receptions for the Los Angeles Rams. Over the middle, down the sideline or in the open field, Snow simply had a knack for catching the football.

"Jack had the greatest hands in that time period," Hall of Fame defensive end Deacon Jones said. "You won't talk about his speed, but his speed was deceiving. He would catch that slant pattern over the middle, and I've seen him outrun some guys that we thought were fast."

Snow, a star wide receiver for the Rams from 1965-75 and a longtime team broadcaster, died Monday night, the club said. He was 62.

Snow had been hospitalized on and off for the past two months with a blood-borne staph infection. His family was with him when he died at Barnes-Jewish Hospital in St. Louis, team spokesman Duane Lewis said.

"He was a great teammate, one of the hardest-working guys that I played with," Jones said. "A terrible loss, a terrible shocker. Jack was a young man."

Snow, the father of Gold Glove first baseman J.T. Snow, was an analyst on the Rams' radio broadcasts, moving to St. Louis with the team 10 years ago. His final game in the booth was Nov. 20 during the Rams' home loss to Arizona.

Snow was selected to the Pro Bowl in 1967 and still ranks among the team leaders in several receiving categories. He had 340 receptions for 6,012 yards (a 17.7 average) and 45 touchdowns in 150 career regular-season games for the Rams. In 1967, he averaged 26.3 yards on 28 catches.

"The guy ran the best patterns of any receiver during our period," Jones said. "He was one of the few guys we had that would go across the middle and catch that football. He was tough, tough as nails."

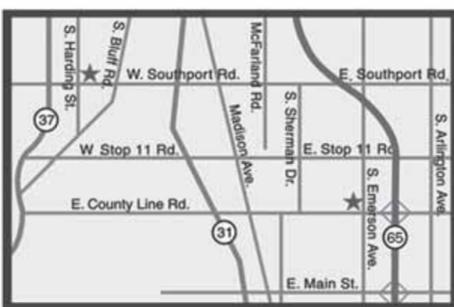
After an All-America career at Notre Dame, Snow was drafted eighth overall by the Minnesota Vikings in 1965 but soon traded to Los Angeles, where he spent his entire 11-year NFL career.

"Jack was a special part of the Rams' family for many years," Rams owner Georgia Frontiere said. "It's very painful when a loved one is taken from us, but fortunately we are left with so many exciting and beautiful memories that we shared with Jack on and off the field."

Added Lawrence McCutcheon, the Rams' director of player personnel, who played with Snow from 1972-75: "When I came, in he had been in the league four or five years. He was well-established, a great route runner, very dedicated to the game with outstanding hands, and he had the ability to relate to younger players and help them adapt to professional life."

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